Dungeon®

ADVENTURES FOR TSR ROLEPLAYING GAMES

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THE ARTIST'S LOVING TOUCH

BY CHARLES C. REED

Romancing the stone

Artwork by George Vrbanic
Cartography by Diesel

Charles is a graduate student in structural biology, a martial arts instructor, and a homebrewer, not necessarily in that order. He uses the same homegrown campaign world for all of the games he referees. His players have seen over 150 years of campaign history unfold.

"The Artist's Loving Touch" is an AD&D® adventure for good-aligned characters of levels 2–4 (about 8 total levels) that can be set in any city with which the PCs are familiar. Good investigational skills and a little muscle are advantageous in the adventure. Characters should possess one or more magical or silver weapons. This tale concerns an artist with the ability to turn flesh into stone. Should the PCs at any time suspect a medusa or other petrifying monster, the DM should feel free to play up the PCs' concerns and needless preparations. Surprises are always so much fun.

Adventure Background

Five years ago, the famed sculptor Romero Selejian began losing his artistic touch. Arthritis and old age had taken their toll on the old master's skills, and despite a *cure disease* spell and various other herbal and alchemical interventions, his eyes and hands were simply failing him.

Aspiring artists who once eagerly sought apprenticeships with Romero turned elsewhere, and the expensive commissions stopped rolling in. The loss of income was a blow to old Romero, but the loss of respect as his once-loyal patrons flocked to younger "fledgling" sculptors was more than he could bear. Faced with debts that he could not pay, Romero was preparing to sell his large studio, left to him by his old master, the renowned Anashan Poro, a true artist whose fountains and statuary grace the city to this day.

While cleaning out an old storage room one evening (a long, difficult and painful task for the poor man), Romero discovered a small chest containing a slip of parchment and a pair of soft leather gloves.

The parchment was written by Anashan and was dated 40 years ago, just prior to his death. The note read as follows:

Most gifted Romero,

I have labored years to create beauty everlasting, but my life is now drawing to a close. My work will live on, and as long as one person looks upon my creations and smiles, I feel that my life has counted after all.

There is one secret I have kept, one that made me the sculptor I am today. That secret is in this box. These gloves were given to me as payment by a rather eccentric mage who thought he was doing me an invaluable service. The gloves, when worn, have the unique ability to transmute flesh into the purest marble and back again. The left glove converts flesh into rock, while the right undoes the process. The items have a limited number of uses, the mage told me, but more than enough for me to produce some of the finest sculptures ever seen.

Knowing their power and trying to best it has been my driving force. I am confident that man, without the aid of magic, is equal to any task under the sun. No magic, I vowed, would ever produce better art than my human hands! I have spent my life with that fire under me, driving me to greater and greater creations. In you, I see fire also, but a fire of a different type. You want people to see your work and remember you—to live in awe of you. You want their lips to utter your name in stark amazement as they view your works.

Romero, my boy, take this fire and use it! Pour your emotion into your work and it will show, but do not let the fire that drives you consume you as well! You have the potential to be my better, and this is all I want for you. If you ever lack inspiration, remember my own personal challenge of the gloves. This is my last lesson to you.

Anashan

For the Dungeon Master

The supple gloves are indeed *gloves of petrification*, and the story Anashan tells is accurate. Anashan's box was misplaced in the confusion that occurred following the old master's passing on, and it sat in storage in the basement until recently.

Unable to resist the temptation, Romero donned the gloves and tested them on his mule, Stubborn Billy, creating the Romero Selejian piece *Old Mule at Work* which sold for 850 gp at an art auction six months ago.

Since then, Romero has become enamored of the gloves' power to create artwork and has gone so far as to recruit a group of low-life wererat thugs to act as his apprentices and find human "models" for his work. These thugs are amenable to the charade, as it lets them profit for only an occasional kidnapping of man or beast. Aided by a clan of jermlaine, the wererats take great delight ambushing lone "subjects." At first their attacks were limited to the city outskirts, but lately the wererats have become lazy and begun to lure local people into ambushes, unbeknownst to the artist. Romero wants only fame and respect, and he gives most of his profits to the wererats. If and when the gravy train runs out, the wererats have no qualms about doing in their aged and unbalanced partner.

Employment Opportunities

The adventure begins when the PCs are approached by a friend or acquaintance, perhaps an innkeeper or merchant, with an inside tip on a small bit of employment. A rich group of art collectors in the city is holding a dinner and auction in two days and needs low-profile but reliable security. Tasteful entertainment (singing, musical instrument, storytelling, magic) would also be appreciated. The job is for one evening and pays 100 gp, paid upon completion of the job. Proper dress and good manners are required. (No sweaty, unwashed, rusty-armored warriors need apply.)

The location is the home of a rich spice merchant, and any interested parties must go there to be interviewed. If the PCs are interested, they can get directions to the house.

The house and grounds of the merchant are immaculate. The DM should read the following boxed text:

> You enter the well-tended estate through a narrow gate. Before you stretches a gravel path leading to the house proper. The soothing sound of water can be heard from a fern-covered spring nestled against the wall to your left. A gardener bending over a rose bush looks up, waves, and motions you toward the main doors. As you approach, the doors open and a group of chatty, well-dressed people emerge. They appraise your group and grow quiet as they pass. A liveried servant standing by the open door welcomes you and invites you in.

PCs are led to the great hall, which is already being prepared with tables, chairs, and pedestals for displays. The merchant lord, Welryn Barre, personally conducts all interviews:

> You are led to a room being prepared for the art auction. Servants and workers are anxiously setting up pedestals, chairs, and tables. The walls are being cleared to hang paintings. In the corner, a young artist argues loudly with a servant over the placement of some tapestries. All work momentarily stops as a short man enters the hall. He is dressed simply but tastefully in a light linen tunic. Several rings on his hands glitter with precious stones. He has a weak chin, but when he speaks there is a note of command in his voice.
>
> "Hello, I am Lord Barre. You will please address me as such. So, you are here about the job offer? Good. Now tell me, why should I hire you?" He looks you over and awaits your answer as work resumes in the hall.

Lord Welryn Barre is aloof and snobbish but has a keen intellect. Assuming the PCs don't insult him too badly, they are hired for the security job two days hence.

The Dinner and Auction

The first part of the evening unfolds without incident. Works of art are displayed throughout the great hall, including paintings, tapestries, jewelry, and sculptures.

Over 50 patrons attend the show, and about half that number are artists and and apprentices.

The boxed description of the auction can be read or paraphrased to the players:

> Loud conversations, heated debates, laughter, and music permeate the hall this night. People move slowly around, inspecting the many sculptures, paintings, tapes-

The Villains

Romero Selejian: AL CN; AC 10; MV 9; 0-level; hp 6; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type or special; S 13, D 12, C 9, I 16, W 8, Ch 11; ML 16; *gloves of petrification* (see below), knife. Romero is 68 years old with white hair and a thick white mustache. His eyes are large and watery. He typically dresses in expensive clothes, as he is conscious of other peoples' opinions of him. His hands are weathered but still powerful, although they occasionally shake slightly. He usually carries 56 sp, 35 ep, and 60 gp, or thereabouts. He also wears the *ring of protection* for the stone guardian in area **6**, and a necklace of silver and pearls worth 285 gp. He carries a ring of keys to all locks in the studio. Romero possesses non-weapon proficiencies in artistic ability (sculpture), stonemasonry, pottery, and etiquette. Do not play him as an insane old fool; he wants to be famous once again and will not let some meddling adventurers stop him. He thinks the wererats have been careful in procuring "models" and is not aware of their tricks and lures in the city. If the PCs need a challenge, Romero could have a pinch or two of *dust of disappearance* given to him by an alchemist in return for a small statue.

Wererats (3): INT very; AL LE; AC 6; MV 12; HD 3+1; hp 23, 16, 14; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; SA surprise; SD hit only by silver or +1 or better weapons; SZ S-M; ML 12; XP 270; *MM*/237; short sword, dagger, and see below.

The wererats have adopted the aliases Nunzio, Lenicius, and Rudivan for their sculpting apprenticeships. In addition to the weapons they typically carry, the strongest wererat, Nunzio, wields a *scourge +1*, and his Strength gives him an additional +1 to damage with any weapon. The wererats carry 1d100 sp and 5d10 gp each. They have keys to all doors in the studio except for Romero's room. The largest also has the key to the chest in area **3**. The ratmen are natural liars and thieves, and they have used their talents to lure prospective models to the studio as well as kidnap them.

Jermlaine (24): INT average; AL NE; AC 7; MV 15; HD 1–4 hp; hp 3 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1–2 or 1–4; SA see below; SD see below; SZ T; ML 12; *MM*/176. The jermlaine clan allied with the wererats inhabits its tunnels that connect with the town sewer system. They are armed with small darts (1–2 hp damage) and tiny pikes (1–4 hp damage). They also wield blackjacks (2% cumulative chance per blow of causing unconsciousness). The jinxkins aid the wererats in setting ambushes and are experts at trip cords and snares. Ambushes are typically set late at night on little-traveled streets, or consist of fast multiple attacks with blackjacks on an unsuspecting victim. Such ambush and trap tactics could be used against adventurers at the studio or in the neighborhood. Treasure found on the jinxkins will be scant—several coppers and silvers. Their lair is quite distant and almost impossible for non-jermlaine to reach.

tries, and pieces of ceramic. Serving boys laden with huge trays of fruit, cheeses, and bread scurry through the crowd. Wine and sweet meads flow freely. Over one hundred people are in attendance tonight, half of them well-to-do art patrons, and there is more wealth concentrated in this room than you can believe. The auctioning begins at the far end of the hall, and bids ring out from around the low dais set up for display. Elsewhere in the room, groups of people wander past the displays and consult the artisans.

The talk of the night is the great comeback of the sculptor Romero Selejian. In only six months, he has gone from being down-and-out to holding (once again) the premiere position among the city's sculptors. Four of his pieces—all beautiful studies of the human form—are displayed tonight. One particularly stunning piece that is *not* for sale depicts a large, long-haired man casually holding a set of fine woodworker's tools; the piece is titled *The Master's Touch*. It is to be part of a larger series of craftsmen statues and will be sold when all the pieces of the series are completed. The three works are expected to sell for over 3,000 gp each. PCs can mingle so long as they remain alert and attentive to their job, for Welryn checks in with them several times during the night.

Any PC with artisan skill is well-received by most of the artists present. The PCs hear talk concerning the amazing return of Romero Selejian to the art world. Some artists voice their resentment, saying that Romero is washed up and should retire. Other artists whisper and comment that his recent works all have an underlying tone of desperation in them. Still others want to know where he is buying his stone, as it is so flawless. Speaking with Romero himself is difficult, as many of the patrons take up his time, and his three apprentices (the wererats in human form, hiding their sewer stench behind strong perfume) attempt to shield him from any brusque or rude questioning with well-crafted and highly misleading lies. Remember that they want to perpetuate the illusion that Romero is still a great sculptor and freely dissemble to convince others of this point. Vivid descriptions of long hours in the studio, backbreaking labor as they move the raw stone slabs, and choking on marble dust as the great Romero works are some of the lies that they tell. The auction grows long and tedious as the place quiets down later in the evening. Romero's works will be sold for the expected amounts, and he beams with pride as his statues are auctioned off one by one. The eyes of his apprentices will sparkle with avarice as the sums of money grow larger and larger. The auctions and mingling can be played out if players enjoy this type of roleplaying, or events can simply be summarized briefly.

The Jealous Artist

During the auction, as one of Romero's statues is being sold, Maelor Tosh, a young artist who drank a wee too much wine, begins to complain loudly about "that washed-up second-rate rock-hacker." While crudely mocking Romero's work, he makes his way to the front of the room and

knocks over a statue—luckily not one of Romero's. This prompts cries of help from the patrons, and the PCs must now act if they have not already done so. The destruction of the sculpture prompts the artist who owned the piece to throw a punch at the drunken Maelor. A large brawl ensues, with nearly a dozen artists, apprentices, and patrons involved. All brawlers are 0-level humans with statistics similar to those for Maelor's (see below).

Romero is guarded by his apprentices who use deadly force to keep him safe from harm. Romero and his apprentices do not involve themselves in the general melee unless someone directly threatens them or their sculptures.

PCs should try to quell the brawl with a minimum of lethal power. Nobody is using weapons except the wererat apprentices, and only to defend Romero. (Most brawlers, even the drunk Maelor, have enough sense to avoid three nasty men with daggers.) A little judicious use of muscle or magic on the part of the PCs should calm matters. The DM should remember that the city guard is only a loud shout away, should things go awry in the brawl. Ideally, nobody should be killed or even badly injured, though several egos may be bruised.

After the brawl, the auction comes to a rapid conclusion with the final lots being quickly sold off. Artists involved in the brawl end the evening profusely apologizing to their patrons and customers. Romero and his troupe leave with their heads held high for avoiding the fistfight and for successfully selling their works.

As long as the fight was handled with restraint by the PCs, they receive their pay with an added 50 gp bonus and many thanks from Welryn.

Maelor Tosh: AL NG; AC 10; MV 12; 0-level; hp 6; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d2 (punch); ML 12; XP 15 (none if slain); unarmed.

Maelor is a handsome, reckless man embittered by his failure to garner recognition as an artist.

Enter Nora

The following day, the PCs pass a young woman crying as she hammers a strip of parchment to a wall close to where the PCs are currently residing. The DM should read the following boxed text:

> You see a young red-haired woman nailing a slip of parchment to a wall. She is quietly weeping as she works. Suddenly, she lets out a cry, drops the hammer, and shakes her fingers. Looking around, she walks up to a passerby and exchanges some muffled words. The man she has stopped shakes his head and moves on. She talks to and receives the same response from an old woman walking past. Looking bereft, she picks up the hammer and resumes nailing the parchment to the wall.

The woman's name is Nora Howzell, and the parchment reads:

> *Missing!*
> *Jared Howzell, cartwright,*
> *tall with brown hair and blue eyes.*
> *If seen, contact Nora Howzell on*
> *Copper Kettle Street*

She introduces herself to nearby people, including the PCs, and asks if they have seen her husband, Jared Howzell. If the characters express any interest in listening to her, she talks to them at length. She is highly distraught and continues crying as she tells them her story.

A week ago Nora's husband, Jared Howzell, went to an address on Livermore Avenue to fix a carriage. He never returned. She was not home when Jared made the appointment and does not know who requested the repair. She went looking for him the next day but, after pounding on the door of the building for an hour and getting no response, gave up. She asked people in the neighborhood and found that the building was an old brewery that has been abandoned for over a year. She also learned that another person had disappeared in that area two weeks ago—a large bear of a man named Quinn, a journeyman carpenter. The city guard was of no help to her. She pleads with the PCs for help, telling them that she does not have much gold but will give them every copper she owns if they can find Jared and return him to her safe and sound.

Investigating the Disappearances

The area where Jared disappeared is a business district with several small open marketplaces, merchant houses, and a fair share of ramshackle dwellings (see map on page 12). The main streets are wide and straight, but the side streets are narrow and twisted. Romero's studio has alleys on three sides and faces onto King's Way. The following information (in the form of quotes from the locals) can be gleaned after a day or two spent questioning the locals or overhearing other conversations. Let the PCs slowly gather the rumors as they search the neighborhood. Some of the quotes are true, some less so:

1. "The Surly Satyr needs a new bouncer. The last one just up and left last week and hasn't been seen since." (True; perhaps play up the timing of the bouncer leaving with the disappearances.)

2. "Romero's studio has been awful quiet lately. It used to be really noisy with hammering at all hours." (True.)

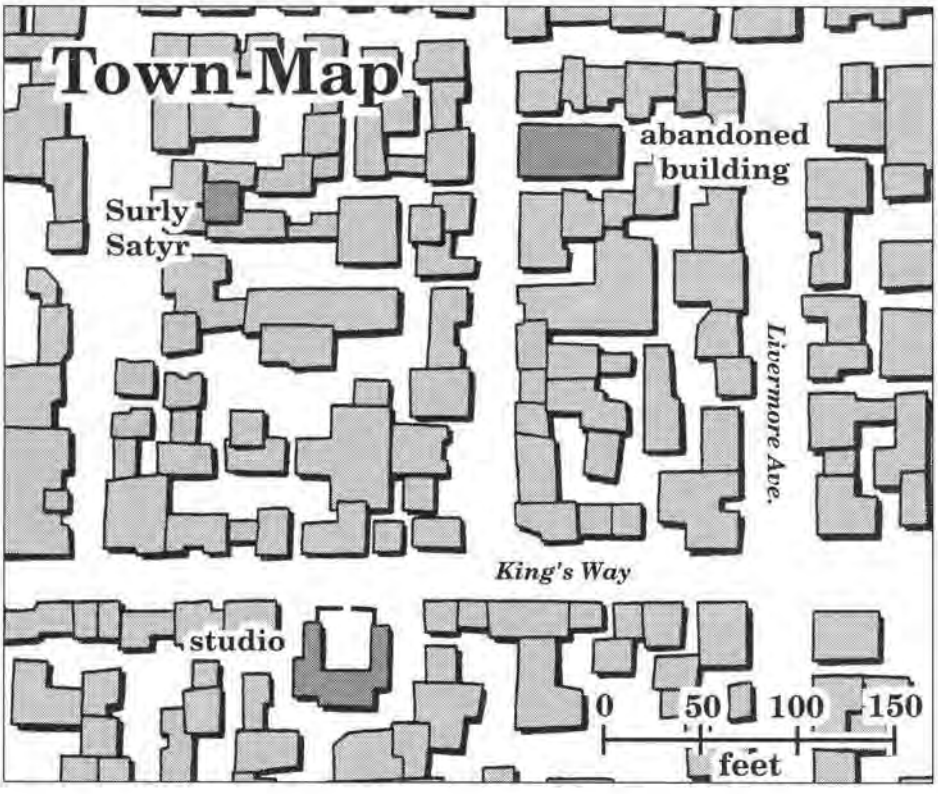
3. "That carpenter who disappeared had a bone to pick with that cartwright. They were fighting over the same job!" (False; planted by the wererats.)

4. "I saw these little men in leather armor running down the alley. They were dragging a big guy in a net. They went that way. I swear, I saw it not two fortnights past." (True.)

5. "One of Romero's rivals, Tosh, has been spying on the studio. I think he's trying to put the old artist out of business—permanently." (Partly true.)

6. "I saw that carriage-builder, Howzell, a week ago. He sat down next to me at the Surly Satyr. He was with three oily-looking guys. They bought some rounds then parted ways. Howzell left through the front door, and his drinking buddies stayed at the Satyr for at least another hour. They bought a bottle of the best wine the barkeep had." (True; the barfly who gives this rumor between sips of ale did indeed see Jared.)

7. "There've been too many thefts in the marketplace recently. The city guard is looking out for a renegade footpad operation in the area. Hold that coin purse tightly!" (True; jermlaine are responsible, but the guards are doing nothing since this is not a well-to-do neighborhood.)



8. "Those two guys who vanished near here aren't the only ones. There have been people all over town who've gone missing. Mark my words, there's something evil stalking the streets, and it ain't the city guard!" (True)

The Surly Satyr

PCs who investigate Rumor #1 might want to investigate the Surly Satyr. The tavern is located at the end of a narrow blind alley with a nearby sewer opening (perfect for an ambush by jermlaine). The Surly Satyr is a small building with two floors. Many seedy characters hang out here, but there is little real threat of violence or trouble. Regulars can confirm Rumor #6 for the price of some cheap ale (3 cp). For a round of good lager (1 sp), they also reveal that the three who were with Jared were apprentices of Romero. They come in from time to time but do not frequent the place too often. Attempting a stake-out here is one idea; see "Events Outside the Studio" (page 13) for more information.

The Abandoned Building

Investigating the abandoned building where Jared was supposedly working might turn up clues. The 40' × 80' building is the old Ogre's Eye Brewery and has been closed for over a year. If the characters investigate the building, read the following text:

> The wooden building appears abandoned. A faded sign leaning by the door proclaims it The Ogre's Eye Brewery. There is only one entrance—a large set of sliding doors much like a barn. The few windows are shuttered, although one window on the side is open. The building is badly in need of paint, although it looks solidly built.

The door is on the 40' wall facing the street and is barred from the inside. The shutters are latched from within. Opening the shutters is easily accomplished with a thin knife blade or something similar. The door, however, is strong and requires a combined Strength score of 45 or more to break. (Up to four human-sized characters can attempt to push on the door at the same time.) Dismantling the sliding mechanism still leaves the door barred and closed. If the PCs enter, read the following:

> The interior of the old brewery is a single, mostly empty chamber. Opposite the door sit several large vats. One vat rests on a rusted metal framework three feet off of the floor. Near the vats rest a dozen barrels. The floor around the vats is littered with old cloth sacks. To the right of the door is a small, two-wheeled wooden cart. Next to the cart is a sturdy though unfinished wooden table. Dust covers almost everything, but the area by the door and cart are dust-free.

The vats are empty vessels from the brewery. Most of the barrels are empty, but one contains several slit pouches. Empty sacks (once containing malted grains) litter the floor. The sacks are filled with holes and are useless. Near the door is a smallish, two-wheeled cart which has just had one wheel recently repaired. (That wheel is brand new.) The table is a dusty, heavy workbench that is surrounded by bits of wood and wood shavings. The area around the cart and by the door is not dust-coated, although the rest of the interior is. Thorough searching reveals a small 1'-diameter drain opening in the middle of the floor that is dust-free. (It is used by the wererats and jermlaine for access.) The drain leads to the city sewers. Characters inspecting the drain closely have a 5 in 6 chance of spotting rat tracks and tiny footprints leading to and from the drainhole, vanishing beyond 10 feet.

Both Jared (the cartwright) and Quinn (the carpenter) were lured by the wererat apprentices to this location and given some minor work—the cart and table. The jermlaine then set up ambushes in the nearby alleys. This tactic, while effective in the short-term, is their downfall. Too many suspicions are being raised by these localized disappearances.

Maelor Tosh

Finding out about Maelor Tosh also provides some useful information. During daylight hours, the PCs can observe him watching Romero's studio from across the street.

Confronting Tosh yields a confession that he is jealous of Romero's reborn skill and that he desperately wants the old man's secret. If questioned about the rash of disappearances, he claims to know nothing. He must be persuaded to reveal that the studio has been very quiet for a sculptor's workshop, and Romero is never seen outside the studio without one or more of his so-called apprentices.

Courses of Action

One option that might present itself to PCs during the adventure is returning to the auction site. This endeavor is fruitless, as everyone has long gone home. Welryn has little time to meet with the PCs. Going to the houses of the people who purchased statues only makes the servants of the house call for the city guards, assuming the PCs even know who bought the statues and where any of the purchasers live. Under no circumstances do the owners allow the PCs to examine their purchases (... and how *dare* they have the nerve to accuse Romero of wrongdoing!) Should the PCs manage to inspect a statue, they find a beautiful and realistic stone creation that radiates magic. The statues, as already stated, are victims of the *stone to flesh* power of the *gloves of petrification*. The owners of the statues refuse to believe that their acquisitions are anything more than expertly-crafted sculptures. Rich art patrons do not like to have their collections poked and prodded by common-folk.

Going to the city guard will be a wasted effort. They can confirm Rumors #3, #7, and #8 but are already overworked and cannot supply the PCs with help. Other disappearances over the past few months have included several young men and women, and at least one child. The earlier disappearances all occurred on the outskirts of town, but recently several have occurred in the King's Way area. In a city, though, this is not unusual. Without overwhelming direct evidence, the militia refuses to bother any local residents, especially successful artists or the wealthy. One aging sergeant-of-the-guard, Larik Canteel, lends a sympathetic ear. Larik, a former adventurer, is on duty whenever the PCs initially contact the guard. He listens carefully and encourages the PCs to continue in their investigation (on their own, of course). He knows the value of motivated adventurers.

Larik Canteel: AL LG; AC 4; MV 12; F5; hp 38; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type +1; S 16, D 13, C 14, I 10, W 11, Ch 13; ML 14; chain mail, shield, long sword, dagger.

Events Outside the Studio

The following are events that occur while the PCs investigate the neighborhood. The DM should use any or all as needed.

1. Thugs. One or more PCs are accosted by 2d4 muggers. They demand money before attacking and will leave if appeased with at least 10 sp each. If captured or apprehended, they might be persuaded to share a rumor or two (see pages 11–12). If there is a brawl, at least one of the thieves remains hidden in shadows until the opportunity for a backstab presents itself.

Thugs (2d4): AL NE; AC 8; MV 12; T1; hp 5 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; ML 9; leather armor, club, dagger, sap.

2. Disappearance of Nora. Concerned about her husband, Nora goes back to Livermore Avenue looking for Jared. She goes to the Surly Satyr and is seen by the wererats, who kidnap her and take her to the studio. She could be kept in the basement or turned into a statue as circumstances dictate.

3. Ambush. The vigilant wererats and jermlaine keep an eye on the neighborhood, and inquisitive PCs are spotted eventually. Exact chances are up to the DM, but anyone hanging around the studio is spotted. One or more of the PCs could be victims of an ambush or trap. The many narrow alleys make excellent places to set snares and nets late at night, and openings to the sewers abound. If PCs are separated, one could be captured, taken to Romero, and immortalized in stone.

4. False Medusa Rumor. Romero's wererats spread a rumor about an "old hag with snakes for hair" living in the basement of an abandoned building. This rumor is planted by the wererats if they suspect the PCs of prying into their business. The building could be an ambush site, or the jermlaine could simply string it with snares and set it ablaze when adventurers stumble into the traps.

New Magical Item

Gloves of Petrification

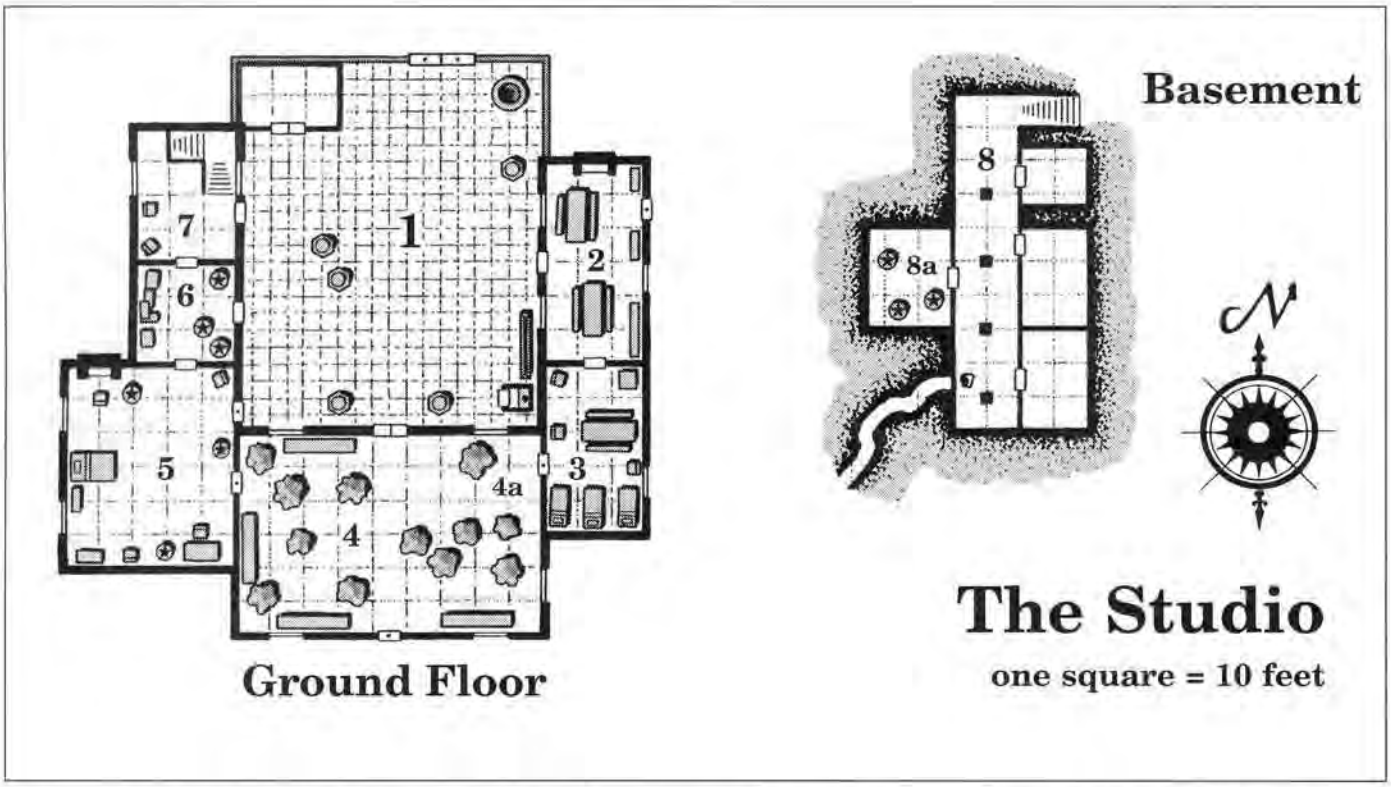
These delicate, supple leather gloves can turn *stone to flesh* (right glove) or *flesh to stone* (left glove). The stone is finest marble. The gloves function at the 12th level of ability, and each one carries 30 charges. So far, Romero has used the left-handed glove 20 times. The right-handed glove is unused and retains all 30 charges. Any petrified individual or creature touched by the right-handed glove must make a successful system shock roll to survive the restoration. Neither glove can be recharged.

The gloves compel their wearer to use them to create "art," whether the wearer is a sculptor or not. Whoever wears the gloves must make a successful Wisdom check every two days to avoid the compulsion, with a +1 cumulative penalty added every subsequent check. Anyone with an artisan skill suffers an additional +1 penalty. Taking them on and off repeatedly does not negate the Wisdom check penalties. The only way to avoid the compulsion is to never use them in the first place or to remove them from the person's possession.

XP Value: 3,200 **GP Value:** 9,000

The Studio

The studio is a single-story stone and wood building consisting of a central courtyard clustered around which are several rooms and a small stable. The roof is made of slate tiles. The wall around the courtyard is 15 feet high and decorated with stone gargoyles that bear a fair resemblance to past members of the town's council. All outer doors and windows are locked. Activity around the studio



is erratic and unpredictable, with the apprentices and Romero coming and going at odd hours both on foot and in the carriage. Exact chances of encountering Romero or the apprentices is left up to the DM. Remember that Romero never leaves the place unescorted, and he often wanders around the compound at odd hours. Time any encounters for maximum dramatic effect. (See "Defending the Studio" below.) Remember that the wererats and jermlaine can enter and leave by the sewers. The DM is encouraged to read through the area descriptions carefully and alter them if needed.

Key to the Studio

1. Courtyard. Weeds and trash litter the studio's courtyard. An outhouse stands in one corner of the yard next to a long wooden trough. There are several empty pedestals arranged in the yard. An ornately decorated well is on one side of the gate, and a stable is on the other side. Four doors and one set of ornate double doors ring the courtyard.

The courtyard is a haven for weeds and broken wine bottles. The stables consist of a single room with space for two horses. The carriage and horses will be here if the wererats are in the studio.

Rats in the stable inform the wererats if intruders are snooping around.

2. Kitchen and Larder. This room is in disarray. An ill-tended fire sputters in the hearth, and dirty plates are piled high on two long tables. Cabinets line the eastern wall. The air smells strongly of stale beer. Rats scurry into the corners and down a vented opening in the floor when the PCs enter.

The rats warn the wererats that company is here. Strewn on the floor are 35 cp, 62 sp, chicken bones, and rotting vegetables. Cabinets on the wall contain a few clean plates, knives and spoons, and some salt-cured beef.

3. Apprentices' Quarters. This room looks like a rat's nest. The floor is strewn with old clothes. The furniture—three cots, a table and bench, and three large chairs—looks chewed. Tallow candles burn in the lamps.

If the wererats are unaware of the PCs, there is a 30% chance they are here. Stashed around the room in small pouches, cups and pockets of clothes are 50 sp and 89 gp. It takes three turns of searching to find it all, however.

Two knives are hidden in the stuffed arm of one chair, and a short sword is hidden in the straw of one of the cots. The wererats use these weapons to attack intruders if confronted in this room. A small crack in the wall, large enough for a rat, leads to the studio (area **4**).

A 2' × 1' × 1' chest is hidden under a pile of mouse-infested straw. It is made of hard wood, locked, and trapped with spring-loaded darts. Anyone opening the chest without first disarming the trap causes three darts to fire forward from the opening (THAC0 17, inflict 1–3 hp damage each). If PCs take no precautions, do not allow Dexterity bonuses to AC. Inside the chest are 384 cp, 203 sp, 187 ep, 295 gp, and some worthless marble chips.

The wererats have over 4,500 gp stashed away in the sewers, quite unreachable by the PCs without advanced magical intervention.

4. Studio.

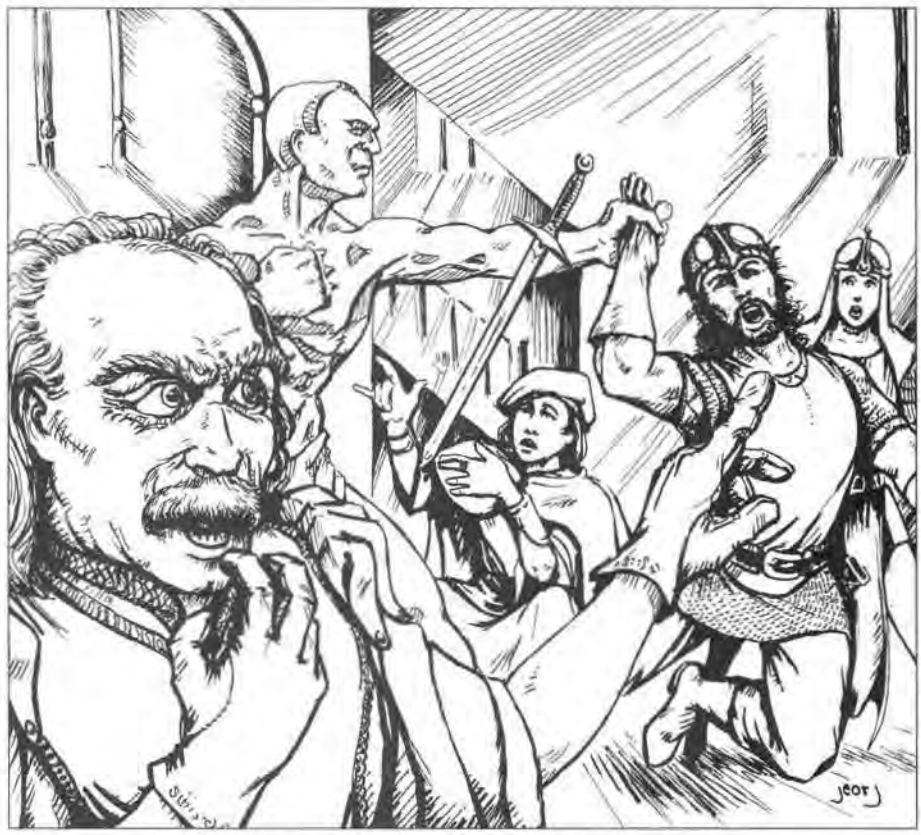
Several large forms draped with cloth rise out of the darkness in this room. All of the windows have been boarded up from the inside. Long benches line the walls, and they are covered with the tools of the sculpting trade—chisels, hammers, files, gouges, and so forth. Most of the tools do not appear to have been used in months, and all bear a layer of dust. The floor has almost no stone chips or rock dust—rather unusual for a sculptor's studio.

Careful inspection of the tools reveals some puzzling clues. A PC with the carpentry proficiency can make a roll to realize that some of the tools are expressly for woodworking, not for sculpting stone. All of the stoneworking tools are in immaculate shape and obviously have not been touched in months.

4a. Under 12 large drop cloths are five large pieces of unworked stone, four half-completed statues, and three beautiful pieces—the long-haired woodworker seen at the auction (Quinn), a stocky young man with powerful hands holding a knife (Jared the cartwright), and an older man leaning on a barrel, with laugh lines deeply furrowing his weathered face. This latter figure is Thaddeus Cooper, a barrel-maker from the outskirts of town. (The DM might give PCs a chance to recognize him if they have purchased any barrels in town.) All three statues are indeed petrified victims of Romero, tricked into posing for the touch of the left-handed glove.

5. Romero's Quarters. The doors to this room are locked. If the PCs bypass the lock, read or paraphrase the following:

This room is furnished simply but tastefully with a large bed, several overstuffed chairs, two tables and a desk. A wardrobe stands along one wall. Three statues—a sleeping cat, a dog standing on its hind legs, and a goat captured in a running pose—accent the room. By the fireplace is another statue of a young woman with a frightened look on her face.



Selejian's stone guardian holds the heroes at bay.

This is the most well-kept area in the compound. Romero spends most of his day here. His desk has two drawers and contains a dozen notes and letters of praise from purchasers of statuary, a leather bag with 157 ep and 162 sp, and some parchment sheets with shaky sketches on them.

Atop the fireplace mantle is a fine wooden box containing 58 gp and a gold ring set with a ruby (400 gp value). The bottom of the box is false (detected as secret door). The compartment contains the note from Anashan (see "Adventure Background") and the right-handed glove.

Seven bottles of good wine (each worth 35 gp), a loaf of day-old bread, and some cheese grace one of the tables. Under the bed is a ring of keys for all of the doors in the compound, and a strongbox with a complex lock (–25% to Open Locks attempts) containing the studio's account ledger, 838 sp and 283 gp. The ledger shows that most of the profits have gone to the apprentices. Total accounts amount to 4,500 gp (not including profits of recent sales).

PCs who study the ledger closely notice that Romero has not been making regular purchases of stone or other necessary supplies—certainly not enough to account for the number of sales he has made recently.

6. Storage Room.

Several wooden boxes sit by the far wall of this storage room. In the center of the room stand three more half-completed statues. A table in one corner has several small blocks of stone and numerous chisels resting on it. Everything is covered with dust, but a path in the dust connects the two doors in the room.

The only other objects in this room are several boxes of hardened clay, two poorly-worked statues, some bits of practice rock, and several old tools.

One of the statues is actually a stone guardian that was given to Romero's old master Anashan by the same wizard who manufactured the gloves. The stone guardian does not

attack anyone wearing the *ring of protection* currently worn by Romero. (The *ring* resembles an ordinary silver band and serves no other function.) The guardian looks like a large, crudely-hewn man. It attacks anyone who opens a door or disturbs the room. The guardian pursues interlopers beyond the room's confines, obeying only the orders of its owner, Romero. Touching the guardian with the right *glove of petrification* causes the stone construct to collapse in a cloud of fine granite dust, inflicting no damage to those in the vicinity.

Stone guardian: INT non-; AL N; AC 2; MV 9; HD 4+4, hp 28; THAC0 15; #AT 2; Dmg 2–9/2–9; SD suffers quarter damage from edged weapons, half damage from cold, fire, and electrical attacks; impervious to normal missiles; SZ M (6' tall); ML 20; XP 420; *MM*/171 (golem, stone variants).

7. Unused Room. This chamber appears to have been someone's quarters but is now unused. A cot frame leans against one wall near two wooden chairs. Stairs by the courtyard door lead down. A faint odor of sewer gas wafts up the stairs.

8. Basement. Old sculptures that were only half-completed, broken chunks of marble and metal, dulled chisels, cracked hammers, and the accumulated junk of a lifetime are packed haphazardly down here. Sounds of scurrying rats emanate from every corner. The floor consists of packed earth, and a row of thick wooden pillars support the hallway. A small hole in the floor has a noxious odor rising from it. Rat tracks surround the hole, as well as other, tiny humanoid-like footprints (belonging to the jermlaine).

The adjacent rooms are piled high with assorted junk of little or no value. The largest room (area **8A**) is important, as it contains several of Romero Selejian's magically petrified "failures"—three statues of humans all caught in poses of revulsion or extreme fright. One statue is that of a young girl caught in the act of screaming at the top of her lungs. If reverted to flesh, these three people are very grateful to the PCs. However, they have no money to offer as a reward.

There are ample places for the wererats or jermlaine to hide in the cellar. If Nora was kidnapped, she is down here, either transformed into a statue or gagged and tied in one of the unmarked rooms.

Defending the Studio

Should the wererats and Romero become aware of the characters' entry into the studio—which is likely given the building's rat and jermlaine population—they take steps to defend themselves. The wererats, in rat form, can move freely through the compound to attack from an unexpected position. An ambush in the studio, with several jermlaine hidden under cloth, is one possibility. Should the characters approach area **6**, Romero could open the door and unleash the stone guardian. The wererats could also do this but would have to change form immediately to avoid being attacked by the guardian themselves.

Should the fight turn against the wererats or the jermlaine, they flee into the sewers, retreating to their secret lairs. If the PCs are having too easy a time, the wererats might call on allies from the sewers. These "reinforcements" (1d6 wererats) arrive in 1d4+4 rounds.

Romero's only attack is the left-handed glove. If PCs know his secret, the glove should not pose too much of a threat, especially if they have the right-handed glove in their possession (taken from area **5**). If they are unaware of its power, however, then Romero could surprise one of the characters with a petrification attack. If subdued or cornered by multiple foes, Selejian surrenders. However, he refuses to remove the glove from his hand unless *charmed* to do so.

Conclusion

Romero refuses to acknowledge that what he is doing is harmful in any way. He insists that the price of art is often high but that the beauty of his art is worth it. He is obsessed with creating sculpture and defies anyone to stop him. Long or repeated questioning does not cause him to waver. He insists that he wanted to create art for the ages and to be remembered as long as his art exists. In short, this was his own twisted bid for immortality. His "models" should consider themselves lucky to be part of his art. PCs who coax these facts from him could receive an XP bonus, at the DM's discretion.

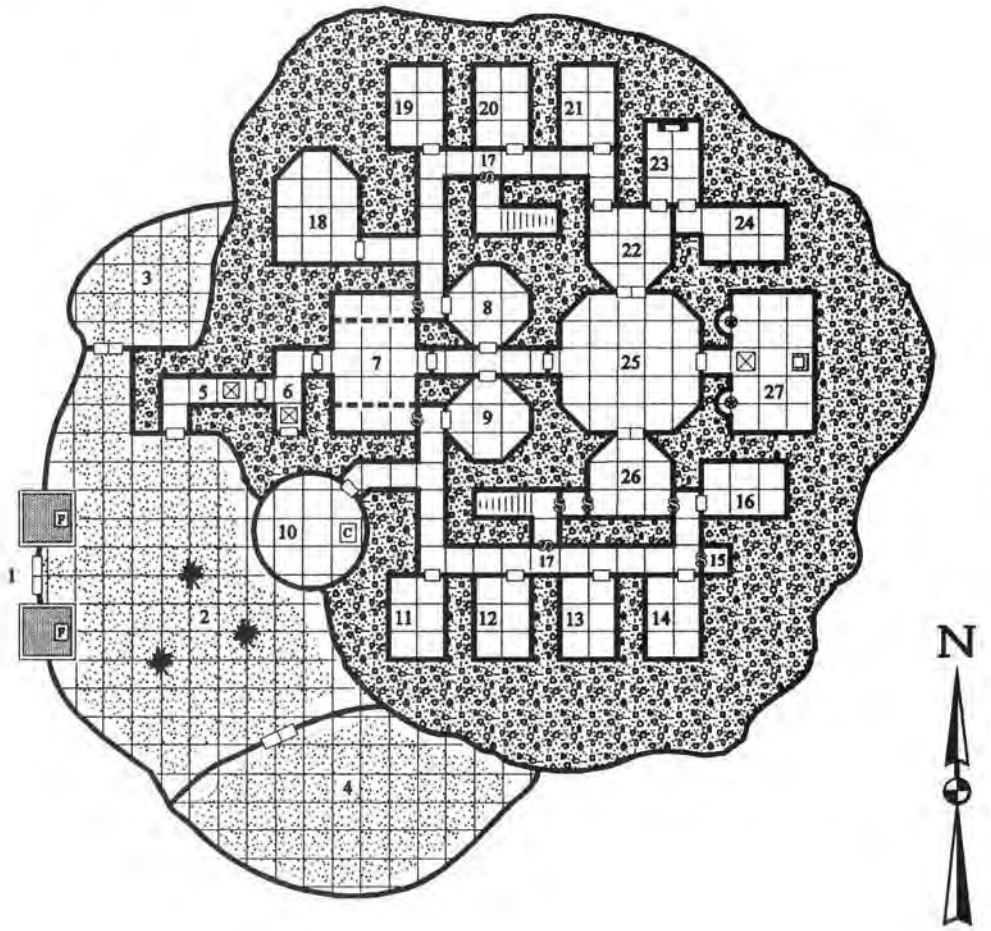
Information from Romero's ledger and notes can lead PCs and/or the city guard to all of the statues Romero has sold. All can be returned to flesh using the right-handed glove. (Should any of those returning to flesh fail his or her system shock roll, charges of kidnapping could turn to accusations of murder, and Romero's punishment might be more severe as a result.) Many of the people who were transformed cannot afford any monetary reward for the PCs but offer heartfelt thanks and friendship. Quinn and Jared could provide services as skilled craftsmen (at no charge), while a good home-cooked meal or two would not be out of the question. This should be ample compensation for good-aligned characters.

Stopping Romero and restoring his petrified victims should net the party 2,000 XP as a story award. Regardless of how the adventure is resolved, the art collectors who lost money demand compensation. This means confiscation of all goods from the studio; how closely the PCs follow this edict is up to them. The mayor's office, however, gives the characters a reward of up to 500 gp (or a potion or scroll, at the DM's option). The PCs could be hired to recover the money taken by the nefarious wererats. A 10% finder's fee will, of course, be included.

Romero's fate, should he survive, is bleak. He becomes apoplectic, raving that his art must not be compromised by the wishes of "naive, uneducated folk who would not know true art if it bit them on the bottom." Needless to say, this defense barely holds water with the local authorities. The raving Romero receives a light jail term, considering his age and health, provided none of his captured victims die in the process of being restored to flesh. Any irony or leniency in his punishment is up to the DM, but a portion of his incarceration could include a stint on the rock pile. Ω

Maps of Mystery

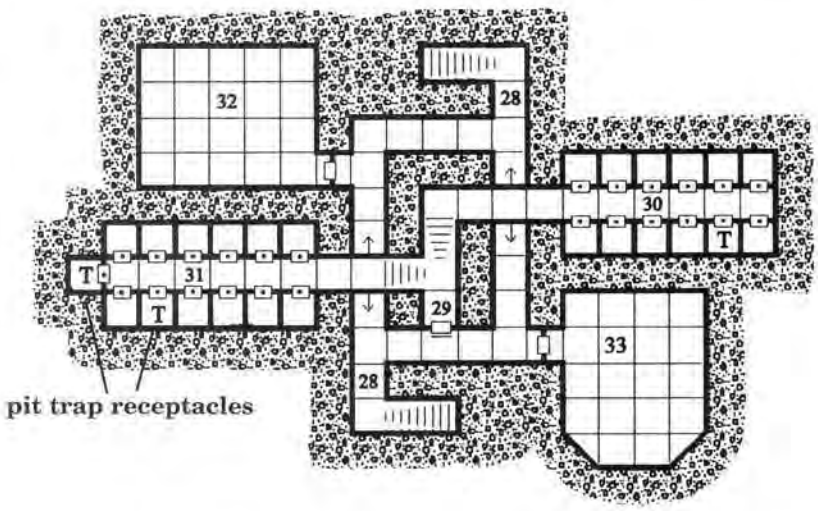
Cartography by Chris Perkins



Need a lair for your campaign villain? How about a haven for a roving band of humanoids? Well, now you have one.

We're offering something new this issue: a ready-to-use map around which you can create your own adventures! The map is intended for home campaign use. There are no encounters other than the ones you create. You decide what dwells within each chamber and what savage monsters lurk in the dungeons.

Let us know what you think of this feature and whether we should continue showcasing "Maps of Mystery" in future issues.



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Scientists analyze an alien datapad recovered from deep space.

CONVERGENCE

BY CHRISTOPHER PERKINS

Scientific exploitation

Artwork by rk post
Cartography by Diesel

Special thanks to Kim Mohan, David Eckelberry, and Wolfgang Baur for their assistance in refining this adventure.

"Convergence" is an introductory adventure designed for the ALTERNITY game. The adventure is intended for novice players and Gamemasters and is best played with 4–8 heroes of beginning level. However, heroes of Levels 2 or 3 will still find the adventure challenging. This module sets the stage for an ongoing STAR*DRIVE™ campaign; it also adapts nicely to the Gamemaster's own campaign. The heroes should include at least one of each profession: Combat Spec, Tech Op, Free Agent, and Diplomat. Mindwalkers are optional. The adventure assumes that humanity has crossed the threshold of the Gravity Age (Progress Level 7), utilizing such technological wonders as the stardrive, stutter guns and artificial gravity planes.

To run the scenario effectively, Gamemasters must familiarize themselves with the ALTERNITY rules as outlined in the *Player's Handbook* and *Gamemaster Guide*. The adventure is intended for human heroes, although non-humans (fraal, weren, sesheyans, mechalus, and t'sa) can be included with few modifications.

If the Gamemaster is introducing novice players to the game, it is recommended that human heroes be used exclusively.

On the Verge

VOIDCORP™, a monstrous stellar nation encompassing dozens of industries and subsidiaries, has devoted limitless resources to stellar conquest in the form of mass reactor construction, tactical weapons development, computer advancement, scientific exploration, and world building. Like a gigantic octopus, VOIDCORP stretches its tentacles across the galaxy, reaching deep into the Verge—that starry expanse unclaimed by any one stellar nation—in search of new worlds and new alien lifeforms to exploit.

Three weeks ago, a VOIDCORP survey cruiser detected unusual energy emanating from a cloud of space debris on the farthest reaches of the Verge. Within this ionized dust field,

the ship's scientists discovered a damaged alien datapad—a small storage device containing fragments of knowledge from an alien culture. Upon making this profound discovery, the scientists set a course back toward VoidCorp space and availed themselves of the opportunity to study the datapad more intensely.

One of the survey team scientists, Dr. Tariel Nuna (a.k.a. VoidCorp Employee LU292 NKI47), managed to crack a data fragment from the alien pad using a cryptograph and complex mathematical sequences. What she deciphered sounded like music—a short but complex string of notes forming a brief, discordant melody. The VoidCorp team was astounded and eagerly sought further revelations. The scientists eventually unlocked a second data fragment that provided unintelligible technical schematics—for what, they could not ascertain.

Resistant to VoidCorp's policy of alien exploitation, Dr. Nuna convinced two of her fraal colleagues that the alien datapad contained secrets of an intelligent alien culture VoidCorp had "no right to conquer." Dr. Nuna voiced concern that VoidCorp would misuse the discovery when she planned to deliver the archive to Insight—a rival but equally expansionistic stellar nation. Her fraal colleagues began to accept Dr. Nuna's rationale that VoidCorp would not allow its scientists to unlock all of the datapad's mysteries before setting forth in search of these potentially hostile aliens. Misled by Tariel's rhetoric, they agreed to help her smuggle the datapad off the ship.

As the survey cruiser headed toward the nearest VoidCorp colony, Dr. Nuna's co-conspirators engineered a computer virus that infected the ship's systems. With the ship adrift and its computer inoperable, Dr. Nuna and the two fraal stole a shuttle transport equipped with a stardrive and made their escape, taking the alien datapad with them.

Trouble at Starstation Aurora

Dr. Nuna took the *CS 459* shuttle to Walin III, a water world "claimed" by Insight. She informed the fraal of her true allegiance, and her colleagues (seeing no recourse) agreed to abandon VoidCorp in favor of Insight. Nuna planned to dock at Starstation Aurora, an Insight-owned water extraction facility orbiting Walin III, rendez-vous with an Insight scientist named Yuri Rolstoi, decipher the remaining fragments of the alien datapad, and await safe transport back to Insight space. However, the computer virus the fraal created aboard the survey cruiser had infected the shuttlecraft's systems as well.

The shuttlecraft went down over the planet's polar region, where it was found by a station rescue team. Both fraal had died instantly in the crash. Nuna survived but spent two weeks unconscious in the station's medical facility while her shattered bones and broken arteries mended. In the interim, scientists aboard the station recovered the alien datapad. When Nuna regained consciousness, she and Dr. Rolstoi began pooling their resources to decipher the alien archive. In the meantime, the station administrator sent a message to Insight, requesting that the stellar nation send a transport to retrieve the scientists and the alien datapad.

Stellar Rivals

The heroes are sent to escort Dr. Nuna and the alien datapad safely to the Karnath system, where Insight can protect them from rival stellar nations. The heroes must travel 55 light-years to reach the Walin system from Karnath—a journey expected to take 11 days plus an additional 11d4+11 days spent recharging the stardrive between jumps.

There are, of course, complications. The remaining members of the VoidCorp survey team eventually purged the fraal computer virus and resumed their original course back to Strome, a system within the Verge where VoidCorp has planetary and orbital installations. Unknown to Dr. Nuna, her shuttle's crash on Walin III activated a radio distress beacon that was picked up by a VoidCorp satellite. VoidCorp now suspects that Dr. Nuna was conducting industrial espionage for Insight (the only stellar nation with a foothold in the Walin system) and has authorized the use of force to retrieve the stolen archive. They have dispatched a strike team to seize the alien datapad from Starstation Aurora before Insight scientists have a chance to decrypt it or smuggle it away.

The VoidCorp strike team arrives at Starstation Aurora one day before the Insight transport carrying the heroes. After a bloody battle, and with losses on both sides, the strike team secures the station. However, Dr. Nuna and Dr. Rolstoi escape aboard one of the station's aquatic survey shuttles and hide under Walin III's polar ice cap.

Using the station's second survey shuttle, members of the VoidCorp strike team attempt to locate Dr. Nuna and Dr. Rolstoi. Meanwhile, the VoidCorp team leader, Teliko Sato (employee NQ771 RIV31), searches the station computers for any information about the alien datapad or its contents.

The Mission Begins

The mission begins in the Karnath system, on one of Insight's colonized worlds. An Insight executive named Yoshiko Matsuharu (code-named FoxyLady) has been assigned the difficult task of assembling a crack team of freelance or corporate operatives to retrieve the alien archive. Read the following to the players at this time:

The setting sun casts its fiery pall over the city as you shoot through the air in a private skycar. The webwork of lit highways and monorails fans out beneath you, and to your left rise the crimson office towers of various Insight subsidiaries. Far below you, in the darkness, are the slums and ghettos of this far-flung colony, but they are not your concern. You have gathered at the behest of Insight, a mega-corp whose fortunes hinge on dozens of planetary operations throughout the galaxy.

The skycar finally sets down at the spaceport. Your contact within the company, a charming executive with a chrome hand, stands ready to greet you as the shuttle doors open. "I am called FoxyLady. I represent Insight's Technical Science division. Please excuse the urgency of my summons." With that, she leads you across the metallic surface of the landing pad and walks you through a maze of service corridors.

"We have been afforded a rare opportunity to study an alien datapad recovered from deep space by one of our scientists, code-named Madame Exo. She made it safely to Starstation Aurora, our facility in the Walin system. She and one of her colleagues aboard the station, a xenologist code-named Sci Lord, have been analyzing the datapad. However, we need you to escort them and the datapad safely back to Karnath. We have better facilities here, and more security."

"Insight wants the privilege of first contact with this alien species. Our stellar rivals would exploit and enslave any species they encountered, and that's something we cannot permit. Starstation Aurora is still in the final stages of construction. It's an industrial facility, not a military outpost—a ripe target for other stellar nations determined to seize the datapad and exploit its contents."

She leads you into the heart of the spaceport where travelers await their transports and stare blindly into large video monitors secured to tracks along the ceiling. You are escorted up a nearby escalator and through a transparent causeway. "We've prepared a company driveship for immediate departure."

A pair of blast doors slide back to reveal a cavernous hangar holding several large driveships. Maintenance teams and shuttle crews scurry about as you follow FoxyLady across the bay to a small transport. "We've taken the liberty of placing your personal equipment in the crew compartments. Good luck."

Yoshiko knows nothing beyond what she's already revealed in her spot briefing. Her superiors declined to inform her that Madame Exo (Dr. Nuna) was an Insight spy placed within VoidCorp or that the alien archive was effectively taken from a VoidCorp vessel. Insight recently "acquired" the Karnath system from VoidCorp and does not want their rival making first contact with a technologically advanced alien culture anywhere near the Verge.

Yoshiko Matsuharu [FoxyLady]

Human Diplomat, Level 2, Insight

STR	8		**INT**	12 [+1]
DEX	9		**WIL**	11 [+1]
CON	8		**PER**	12 [+1]
Durability: 8/8/4/4			Action check: 11+/10/5/2	
Move: sp 16, ru 10, wa 4			# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Marginal/2			Last resorts: 2	

Attacks

Cybernetic arm	8/4/2	d4+1s/d4+2s/d4w	LI/O

Suggested Skills

Athletics [8]; Unarmed Attack [8]; Vehicle [9]—*land 1*; Stamina [8]; Business [12]—*corporate 4, illicit 2*; Knowledge [12]; Administration [12]—*bureaucracy 3, management 4*; Awareness [11]—*perception 1*; Resolve [11]; Culture [12]; Interaction [12]; Leadership [12]—*inspire 2*.

Suggested Equipment

Business uniform, sunglasses, cellular phone, security ID card.

Leaving Karnath Spaceport

If the heroes cannot pilot the *Grifter* themselves, a corporate pilot named Thruster is standing by to take them to Walin III. When the heroes are ready to leave, the pilot receives clearance from the spaceport to lift off. Thruster wears an electronic piloting gauntlet that gives him an added –1 step bonus to his *space vehicle* skill roll.

Zach Riffin [Thruster]

Human Tech Op, Level 2, Insight

STR	10		**INT**	11 [+1]
DEX	13 [+2]		**WIL**	8
CON	10		**PER**	12 [+1]
Durability: 10/10/5/5			Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sp 22, ru 14, wa 4			# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			Last resorts: 2	

Attacks

Unarmed	10/5/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
Stutter pistol	12/6/3	d6+2s/d8+2s/d8+4s	LI/O

Suggested Skills

Unarmed Attack [10]; Vehicle [13]—*air 1, space 3*; Stamina [10]; Computer Science [11]; Knowledge [11]—*computer operation 1*; Navigation [11]—*drivespace 2, system 2*; System Operation [11]—*communications 1, sensors 1, weapons 2*; Technical Science [11]—*jury rig 2, repair 2*; Awareness [8]; Interaction [12]—*seduce 2*.

Suggested Equipment

Radio headset, corporate jumpsuit, professional pilot's gauntlet (provides –1 step bonus to all Vehicle Operation checks), two cigars.

Mission Objectives

"Convergence" is structured around *objectives*. The heroes are faced with one objective that they must complete before proceeding with the next objective. Mission objectives are put forth in the order given below. The Gamemaster should be flexible and ready to make adjustments when heroes perform unanticipated actions.

Objective 1: Reach the Walin System

The *Grifter* is equipped with induction engines and stardrive technology. The journey to Walin is tediously dull, although the Gamemaster may insert some minor interplay between Zach and the heroes or allow the heroes to explore the ship more thoroughly during this time. Consult the adjacent sidebar and map for details.

If the heroes include an attractive female, Zach might attempt to use his Interaction—*seduce* skill to charm her, hoping to make good use of the days spent traveling through drivespace.

When the transport finally enters the Walin system, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

The *Sojourn*-class trader is a commercial vessel. Insight owns several of these ships and uses them to shuttle personnel between their worlds. Their affordability makes them relatively expendable. The vessel is equipped with six radially-dispersed two-man lifepods built into the primary hull and jettisoned from hatches on the ship's underside, with life support system designed to sustain its occupants for 150 hours.

The *Grifter*

Sojourn-class Trader (Civilian)

Compartments: 6	Durability: 24
Maneuver rating: –1	Acceleration: 3 Mpp/phase
Cruise speed: 2 AU/hour	Berthing: 12
Armament:	Mass cannon (Range 5/10/15 Mm) d6+2s/d6+1w/d6+3w [LI(p)]
Defenses:	None
Armor:	Light neutronite (2 dur) d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6–1 (En)
Computer:	Ordinary computer core, Ordinary battle, communi cations, and navigation dedicated computers
Engines:	Induction engine
Power:	Mass reactor rated for 10 power factors
Drive:	5 light-years per starfall

1. Cockpit. This area contains the piloting, navigation, and engineering stations.

2. Storage. This room contains first aid kits, pharmaceuticals, six trauma pack I's, four trauma pack II's, ten spare jumpsuits, and ten respirator masks, 12 emergency e-suits (soft) with vacuum masks and flashlights. Also located here is the primary airlock chamber.

3. Cabin. Accommodates eight people.

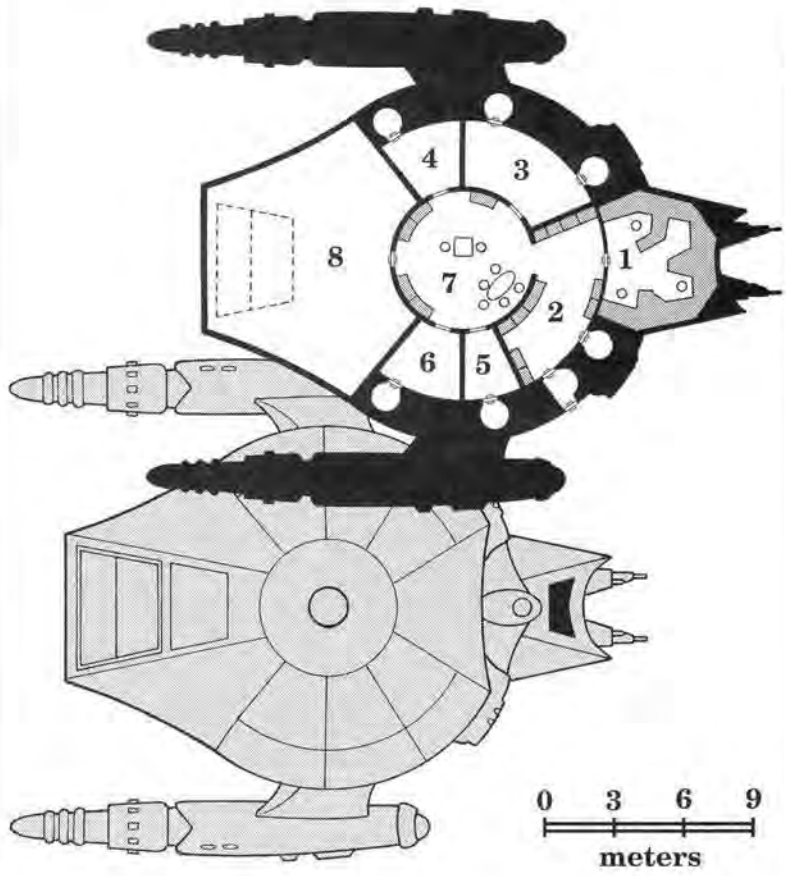
4. Captain's Cabin.

5. Head.

6. Cabin. Accommodates four people.

7. Common Area. This chamber contains holographic games and an eating area. Storage compartments contain a healthy variety of crew rations. Two hatches in the floor lead down to the ship's engineering compartment.

8. Cargo Bay. The cargo bay holds the following equipment: two orbital uplinks, four life support packs, three pairs of magnetic boots, eight emergency beacons, two habitat domes, survival rations for 12 people (lasts six months), survival gear for 12 people, two portable stoves, two water purifiers, two weather monitors, and a half dozen e-suits (soft) with vacuum masks.



The *Grifter*

Sojourn-class Trader

Roll	Compartment	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
1–4	Command	Mass cannon (2/3) Multiphase radar (1/0) EM detector (0/0) Spectroanalyzer (1/0) Ordinary computer core (1/0) Laser transceiver (0/1) Radio transceiver (0/1)	10/10/5
5–7	Engineering I	Induction engine (4/4)	8/8/4
8–9	Engineering II	Stardrive (3/*)	6/6/3
10–13	Auxiliary	Autosupport (0/2) Mass reactor (4/*)	8/8/4
14–17	Crew	Crew quarters (2/0) Mini escape pods (2/0)	8/8/4
18–20	Cargo	Cargo space (4/0)	8/8/4

The tedium of the voyage ends abruptly as the transport reaches its destination. The Grifter crosses the outer system and approaches Walin III. White clouds swirl across the planet's pristine blue waterscape. Visible beyond the pale limb of the planet is Lokatha, Walin III's red moon, while silhouetted against the planet's cobalt glow is a ring-like construct. As you draw closer, you begin to spot lights along its outer rim.

As your angle to Starstation Aurora changes, you notice a blue particle beam tethering the station to the planet below. Sunlight glitters off the crystallized water molecules caught within the station's extraction stream. The station itself looks intact and fully operational. A ship is already docked at one of the radial locking ports.

The transport's sensors can detect power emissions from the station. Any hero who makes a successful System Operation—*sensors* skill check can also ascertain any of the following:

✦ There are minor fluctuations in the station's power emissions. Whether this is the result of damage or is caused by the station's extraction beam is unknown.

✦ Walin is a system with a K-class (orange) star. Walin III has a breathable atmosphere that can support life.

✦ The temperate on Walin III varies from –30 degrees Celsius to 10 degrees Celsius along the equatorial region. Darkside temperatures are well below freezing.

There are 16 lifeforms on the station: Teliko Sato (the VoidCorp team leader), two VoidCorp computer technicians, five VoidCorp "goons" (including one on the VoidCorp gunship), and eight captured station personnel. According to Insight records, the station should have a current crew complement of 36 personnel. However, many were killed in the VoidCorp raid. There are also two more VoidCorp goons in an aquatic shuttle; they are searching the planet for signs of Dr. Nuna and Dr. Rolstoi. The aquatic shuttles can be detected only if the *Grifter* enters low orbit around Walin III and conducts extensive sensor scans of the planet. Locating the shuttle with the VoidCorp team requires a successful System Operation—*sensors* skill check with a +2 step penalty. A new check can be made each hour. Nuna, Rolstoi, and their shuttle are hidden under the planet's ice and can be detected only from low orbit (+4 step penalty) or the station (+5 step penalty). The VoidCorp strike team has had poor luck finding the missing scientists, as the clever Insight pilot has altered the shuttle's sensor signature to emulate one of the whale-like lifeforms indigenous to Walin III.

If the heroes attempt to dock their ship without first contacting the station, Teliko Sato attempts to contact them using the station's communication system (see **Objective 2** below). By all appearances, the station looks fully functional, although heroes might be suspicious of the unmarked gunship docked at Locking Bay 3.

The weapon systems of the station are not yet operational due to corporate cutbacks.

Objective 2: Contact Aurora Station

Teliko Sato and his technicians have most of the station's systems up and running, and any computer lockouts activated during the initial raid on the station have been overridden. Attempting to contact the station from the *Grifter* requires a successful System Operation—*communications* check. If the heroes identify themselves and request to board the station or refuel, read the following to the players:

Your message is greeted with a disembodied voice from the station. "This is Starstation Aurora. Message confirmed. We've been expected you. You are cleared to dock at Locking Pad 2. If your vessel requires refueling, please inform the utility robots stationed in the docking bay. Be advised that weapons and armor are not permitted on the station. Aurora out."

Teliko Sato pretends to be the station administrator, Javier Augustine. If the heroes inquire about Dr. Nuna or the alien datapad, Sato's courteous yet self-assured voice relays the following message:

"Doctor Nuna and Doctor Rolstoi are studying the datapad as we speak. You know scientists! I'll inform them of your arrival. Aurora out."

Any concerns about the gunship docked at Locking Pad 3 receive the following response:

"Corporate cut-backs have left the station poorly defended. Insight has equipped us with a small gunboat for protection until our defense systems are fully online."

Unless a hero uses the Interaction—*charm* skill or clever roleplaying to keep Teliko Sato talking (by sustaining the conversation), Sato severs communication at this time. He suspects either that the heroes are responding to a distress call sent by the station, or that they are actually couriers sent to retrieve the alien datapad from Dr. Nuna and return it safely to Insight space. Realizing that the heroes are working for Insight and guessing that they too have suspicions, he organizes a "greeting party" to meet the heroes at Locking Pad 2 (see **Objective 4** below).

Any time during the conversation with Teliko Sato, heroes may make one Awareness—*intuition* skill check to sense foul play, but only if the player states that his hero is using this skill. If a hero manages to keep Sato "talking," a second roll may be allowed for each hero. If the roll succeeds, the hero strongly suspects that Sato is not who he claims to be. This "feeling" is based on subtle inflections in Sato's voice or the barely audible yet suspicious background noises such as faintly heard voices belonging to the VoidCorp goons or technicians. They also gauge intuitively that Sato might be planning an ambush at the locking pad.

Objective 3: Dock at Locking Pad 2

The *Grifter* must align itself with the locking pad before the latching clamp can be engaged. Docking requires a Vehicle Operation—*space vehicle* skill check. A failed roll indicates that the transport missed the latching clamp; with a few adjustments, a second attempt can be made. A second failure means the ship must come about and make a new (and very embarrassing) attempt.

A robot aboard Starstation Aurora gives the Insight team a "guided tour."

On a Critical Failure (roll of 20), the transport collides with the station, damaging the locking clamp and causing 1d4w to one randomly-determined ship compartment.

Once the locking clamp is damaged, no other attempts can be made to dock at Locking Pad 2 until crew in workpods spend d20 hours repairing the damage. The transport pilot may make another docking attempt at Locking Pad 1.

Objective 4: Board Station & Ascertain Status

Once the *Grifter* has docked, the heroes may board the station via an access tube that attaches to the transport's hull. A metal corridor leads to a series of chambers containing robot maintenance crews, docking control stations, ship refueling systems, zero-g workpods and heavy equipment storage. The exact contents of each room are left to the Gamemaster's imagination, but the following description provides a general concept of the station's inward appearance:

The interior of the station is a fusion of steel grillwork and exposed alloy pipes. The walls and floor have an unfinished look, as if the station were undergoing a refit. Closer inspection of the walls reveals a webwork of entangled circuitry and power conduits. Xenon lighting tubes cast a cold, oppressive glow upon the machinery but leave several areas in shadow. Wide open spaces fail to alleviate the inescapable sense of confinement.

Teliko Sato doesn't really care if the heroes ignore the station's rules regarding weapons and armor. He has made plans to trash the heroes regardless (see below).

Locking Pads 1 and 2 are undamaged. Security cameras mounted to the ceilings enable Teliko Sato to spy on the heroes within these (and other) sections of the station. The utility robots assigned to the area more or less ignore them unless the heroes instruct the robots to begin refueling their ship, in which case they comply.

Robot "Hospitality"

Shortly after they board the station, the heroes are greeted by a silver service robot calling itself Unit 329. The robot offers to escort the heroes to the Exobiology Lab in the Science Quarter (area **12**).

If the heroes request to see the station administrator, Unit 329 informs them that Augustine is indisposed for the moment and will meet them in the Exobiology Lab when time permits. The robot answers any generic questions concerning the station's purpose, but it will not discuss station personnel or say anything more about the other docked vessel (at Locking Pad 3) except that the gunship was provided by Insight.

Any hero making a successful Investigate—*interrogate* skill check or Leadership—*command* skill check can coax the robot into revealing the presence of the VoidCorp strike team and their approximate numbers.

Robots

The station is equipped with three types of robots, all equipped with limited AI (artificial intelligence) that enables them to follow complex orders. Their programming doesn't allow for "three-dimensional thinking" or tasks that require intuitive reasoning. The robots are vaguely humanoid with prehensile digits for manipulating fine objects. Utility (maintenance) robots are gold, service (protocol) robots are silver, and security (combat) robots are dull gray.

Most of the security robots were destroyed or incapacitated during the VoidCorp raid, but some of them were spared and reprogrammed by Teliko Sato's technicians. Most of the utility and service robots are functional, but they have no combat ability. Heroes with the Technical Science—repair skill can fix a damaged robot in d20+20 minutes. Reprogramming a security robot requires a successful Security—*security devices* skill check.

All robots, regardless of type, have built-in interfaces linking them to the station's mainframe (in area **18**). If the mainframe shuts down, the robots continue to operate, but they can no longer receive commands from the command center (area **17**).

Security Robots

STR 10, DEX 8, CON 8, INT 6, WIL 5, PER 4; Act 8+/7/3/1; #A 1; MV sp18/ru12/wa4; Dur 8/8/4, Reaction: Marginal/1. Security robots have the equivalent of the Ranged Weapon—Modern [8] skill. These robots have additional layers of alloy to help absorb weapon damage: d6+1 (LI), d6 (HI), d6–1 (En).

Weapon: Stutter pistol (Type LI/O; Damage d6+2s/d8+2s/d8+4s). This weapon is built into an robot's right hand. A standard power clip for the pistol is inserted into the robot's forearm.

Utility Robots

STR 8, DEX 8, CON 8, INT 10, WIL 5, PER 4; Act 9+/8/4/2; #A 1; MV sp16/ru10/wa4; Dur 8/8/4; Reaction: Marginal/1. Utility robots have the equivalent of the Technical Science [10] broad skill. Utility robots assigned to medical facilities (medical droids) have modified programming equivalent to the Medical Science [10] skill.

Equipment: Each utility robot is outfitted with tools and equipment necessary to complete its assigned job. For instance, a utility robot assigned to repair the water extractor has powered tools designed specifically to repair damage to the extractor.

Service Robots

STR 8, DEX 6, CON 8, INT 6, WIL 5, PER 10; Act 7+/6/3/1; #A 1; MV p14/ru10/wa4; Dur 6/6/3; Reaction: Marginal/1. Service robots have the equivalent of the Interaction [10] skill. They are commonly used as station storekeepers, bartenders, and escorts.

Language Database: Service robots have programming that enables them to speak and translate various known languages and dialects.

Entering Damaged Sections

Several sections of the station were damaged when the VoidCorp strike team first arrived. Render rifle damage appears throughout Locking Pad 3, the Science Quarter, and the Command Quarter. The Gamemaster should note those areas inside the Command Quarter in which Teliko Sato's goons have taken the liberty of setting up booby traps. (See area **15** for details.) Heroes who move into these areas for the first time find destroyed security cameras, burnt-out lighting arrays and sparks from damaged wiring. Read the following if the players require an overview of these violated areas:

You have entered a section of the station filled with the tell-tale signs of a military raid. Many of the power systems are non-functional, as evidenced by the flickering lights, darkened corridors and burnt, crackling wires. The scarred corpses of station personnel are propped in the corners like a child's discarded rag dolls, their faces paralyzed in expressions of shock and fear.

Teliko Sato's Trap

The VoidCorp goons have used their Demolitions skill to rig Unit 329 with two fragmentation grenades. Heroes who inspect the robot and make a successful Awareness check with a +2 penalty detect the devices. Heroes with Awareness—*perception* can make an unmodified skill check. The robot does not explode immediately. Rather, it leads the heroes into area **12**. Teliko Sato, watching through the security camera, seals the two doors to the Exobiology Lab once the heroes are inside. The doors are airtight and impregnable, although heroes with the Security or Demolitions skill can make a skill check with a –2 penalty to open each door. Once the heroes are trapped, Sato trips the robot's explosives.

If the heroes cannot be lured away from their ship, Teliko Sato trips the explosives when most of the heroes are within 3 meters of the robot, relying on security cameras to get a fix on the heroes' locations. Damage from the shrapnel varies: targets within 2 meters suffer Amazing damage (2d6+4w), targets from 2 to 6 meters suffer Good damage (2d4+2w), and targets from 6 to 10 meters suffer Ordinary damage (2d4w).

The explosion does not breach the station's hull, but it does render the lab's security camera inoperable. If the heroes were successfully lured into area **12**, Teliko Sato can't tell if anyone survived the explosion, so he evacuates the air out of the Exobiology Lab just to be sure. Heroes who survived the blast run out of air in 2 rounds. See "Holding Your Breath" in Chapter 3 of the *Player's Handbook* for effects and damage.

In general, Teliko Sato cannot shut down life support in specific areas of the station, but the Exobiology Lab is designed with this feature to accommodate alien species that exist in a vacuum. He restores life support to the lab within 10 rounds and dispatches his goons to deal with any survivors. (See **Objective 5** below.)

Characters with vacuum masks, undamaged e-suits, or jumpsuits equipped with vacuum masks can sustain themselves in the airless chamber until life support is restored or until they escape.

Heroes who spot the explosives on the robot can disarm the grenades by making a successful Demolitions—*disarm* skill check, but if this is done in view of a security camera, Teliko Sato detonates the explosives immediately. If the device is disarmed and the heroes survive the airless vacuum, proceed with **Objective 5** immediately.

Objective 5: Repel Goons

There are five VoidCorp commandos aboard the station when the heroes first arrive.

As the heroes begin moving about the station, Teliko Sato's strike team closes in. Two VoidCorp goons make their way toward the *Grifter*. Once inside, they use their Demolitions—*set explosives* skill to rig two grenades to a timer detonator, placing them under the pilot's controls and setting the timer for 5 minutes. Anyone within 2 meters of the blast suffers 1d4+2m damage; anyone else in the cockpit sustains 1d4+1w damage. Collateral damage from the explosion inflicts 1d6+1w to the ship's command compartment (see Chapter 12 of the *Player's Handbook* for spaceship damage) and renders the pilot's station inoperable. Repair time is 2 man-hours per point of wound damage inflicted.

A successful Demolitions—*disarm* skill check enables one to deactivate the boobytrap safely (assuming the device is found). Once their grenades are set, the two VoidCorp goons either return to the station's Command Quarter or help their comrades (see below).

While two commandos run amok aboard the heroes' transport, two more VoidCorp goons attempt to pin down the heroes in the Science Quarter with render rifles. If these three goons are killed or captured, Sato shuts down all power and emergency lights to the Science Quarter to hamper the heroes' movement. Heroes may unlock powerless doors using emergency levers built into the door frames.

Heroes cannot circumvent the corridors by crawling through the station's cramped ventilation ductwork. The ducts are simply too small.

The VoidCorp goons have studied the layout of the station, and they are constantly communicating with one another (and with Teliko Sato) via comm gear. They fall back to the Command Quarter if hard-pressed and try not to get themselves caught in crossfires and similarly precarious situations, relying on their *intuition* skill to sense traps. A captured goon provides information only if successfully intimidated and interrogated (requiring both the Interaction—*intimidate* and Investigate—*interrogate* skills). If the interrogation is successful, heroes determine VoidCorp's true reason for attacking the station. The Gamemaster may, at this time, read pertinent information given in opening sections of the adventure. The heroes can also learn the locations of the "missing" VoidCorp team members and the station personnel:

✦ A fifth VoidCorp goon is stationed aboard the gunship *LKA 444* (docked at Locking Pad 3).

✦ Teliko Sato is in the Command Center (area **17**), monitoring events through the station's security camera network. (The goons fail to mention that Sato is guarded by two reprogrammed security robots.)

VoidCorp Goons (5)

Human Combat Spec, Level 2, VoidCorp

STR	12	[+1]	**INT**	11	[+1]
DEX	12	[+1]	**WIL**	8	
CON	9		**PER**	8	

Durability: 9/9/5/5 — Action check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: sp 24, ru 16, wa 6 — # Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2 — Last resorts: 1

Attacks

Unarmed—brawl	12/6/3	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
Chainsword	13/6/3	d6+2s/d8+2s/d8+4s	LI/O
Render rifle	14/7/3	d6+1s/d6+1w/d4+1m	En/O

Defenses
Assault gear — d6+1 (LI), d8+1 (HI), d6 (En)

Suggested Skills
Athletics [12]; Armor Operation [12]—*combat armor 1*; Heavy Weapons [12]—*direct fire 2*; Melee [12]—*powered 1*; Modern [12]—*pistol 1, rifle 2*; Vehicle [12]—*air 1, space 1*; Stamina [9]—*endurance 2, resist pain 1*; Demolitions [11]—*set explosives 2*; Knowledge [11]—*computer operation 1*; System Operation [11]—*defenses 2, weapons 2*; Tactics [11]; Awareness [8]—*intuition 1*; Interaction [8].

Suggested Equipment
Comm gear, trauma pack I, vacuum mask, demolitions pack, weapon biokey (attached to handle of render rifle; weapon can be fired only by owner).

✦ VoidCorp's two computer technicians are in the Shuttle Control Center (area **25**), relaying messages to the two VoidCorp goons searching for Dr. Nuna in one of the station's aquatic shuttles.

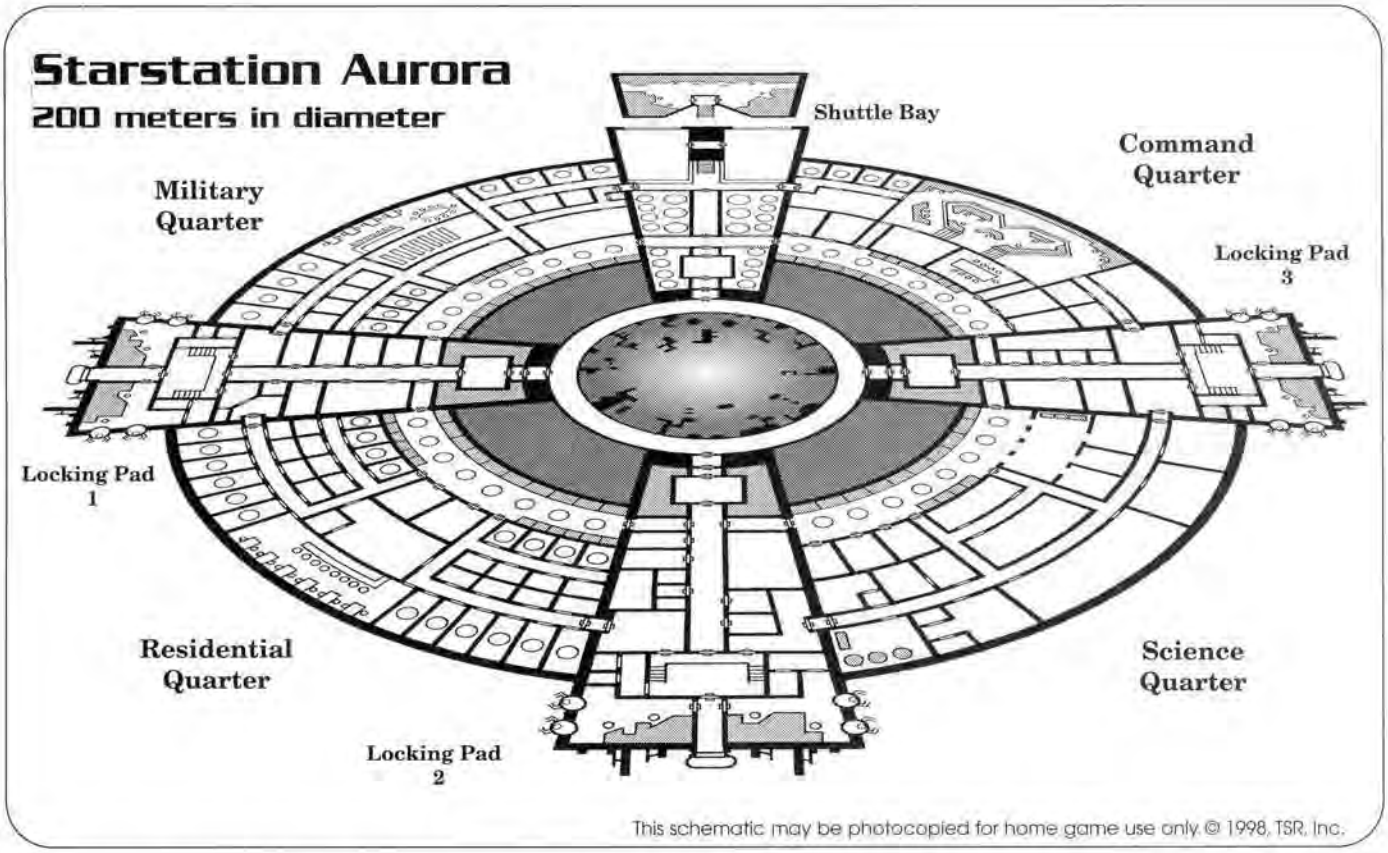
✦ Station personnel are being held in the Military Quarter's medical facility (area **21**).

If the heroes successfully repel or defeat the goons, proceed with **Objectives 6** and **7**.

If the heroes are all stunned, incapacitated or killed, the VoidCorp strike team takes all but one of the survivors to the medical facility in the Residential Quarter (area **6**), straps them to medical beds, and sedates them. Two security robots are stationed near the chamber's exits as guards while the strike team endeavors to complete its mission. One of the surviving heroes (preferably a Diplomat, but a Tech Op would be adequate) is stripped of all weapons and taken to Sato; in this case, skip ahead to **Objective 10**.

Objective 6: Treat Personal Injuries

Heroes who were seriously injured by Teliko Sato's trap (see **Objective 4**) or the subsequent fire fight (see **Objective 5**) should be given the chance to receive first aid or more serious treatment. The Knowledge—*first aid* and Medical Science skills are fully described in Chapter 4 of the *Player's Handbook*.



If the heroes limp back to their transport and Teliko Sato is able to monitor their movements using the security cameras, he directs his goons to close ranks and keep the heroes from advancing beyond the locking pad. If the commandos were unable to plant the explosives in the ship's cockpit, Sato orders his goons to prevent the heroes' escape. If the heroes hold their ground, Sato attempts to negotiate with them. In this case, proceed with the next objective.

Objective 7: Respond to Sato's Ultimatum

If the heroes confine themselves to a well-guarded space within the station (or within their transport), or if they attempt to advance towards the Command Quarter or Shuttle Control Center, Teliko Sato contacts them over the station's intercom system. His calm, soothing voice resonates throughout the station's emptiness:

"This station has been seized by VoidCorp. We do not take kindly to Insight's blunt attempts at industrial espionage. Measures are underway to ensure that what was lost is recovered. I give you this one chance to surrender yourselves and spare the needless waste of ammunition—not to mention the lives of station personnel in our custody. You need only drop your weapons and stand by one of the security cameras where I can see you."

If the heroes comply with Teliko Sato's demands and surrender, he relays the following message via intercom:

"I would like to meet with your designated leader to discuss this unfortunate situation in detail. Whomever agrees to this meeting will remove all weapons and surrender peacefully to my team. The rest of you will confine yourselves to an area monitored by a security camera until we resolve this situation to our mutual satisfaction. Then you can have your precious station back and leave with your lives."

Sato has the heroes' designated representative (preferably a Diplomat, although any hero will suffice) escorted safely to the Command Center (area **17**). If Sato sees that the other heroes have confined themselves to a given location in the station, he dispatches a security robot to stand guard in the vicinity to discourage the heroes from following their comrade or wandering off. Proceed with "Teliko Sato's Ploy" in **Objective 10**.

If the heroes do not comply within a reasonable time limit, Teliko Sato continues speaking via the intercom system.

"Such a pitiful demonstration of defiance. Your failure to comply with my demands only costs the lives of the station personnel held in our custody. Your compliance ensures not only their survival but yours as well."

Teliko Sato does not execute the station personnel but rather instructs his goons to "erase the Insight interlopers."

Objective 8: Rescue Station Personnel

Station personnel not killed during the initial VoidCorp raid are being detained in the Military Quarter's medical facility (see area **21**), along with the cadavers of the two dead fraal who fled with Dr. Nuna. The eight survivors have been sedated and secured to the medical beds. The sedated personnel are guarded by a reprogrammed security robot. Furthermore, there are two non-combative medical (utility) robots present in the medical bay to keep the station personnel unconscious.

If the heroes successfully destroy or immobilize the security robot, they can deactivate the restraining fields and use medical stimulants to awaken the sedated crew. (A Medical Science skill check is required to revive a sedated crewman.) Most of the captives sport minor wounds inflicted upon them during Teliko Sato's interrogation. Among the captives is the station's administrator, Javier Augustine (A.K.A. Zero Shock).

If Augustine learns that the VoidCorp commandos are still aboard the station, he leads his crewmen to a weapons locker in the Military Quarter and equips them with battle jackets and stutter pistols.

If the heroes question one of the awakened crewmen, they receive the following explanation:

"A shuttlecraft carrying three scientists entered low orbit around Walin III and crashed on the planet's polar ice cap. A rescue team was sent down via shuttlecraft to search the wreckage for survivors. The two fraal were dead by that time, but we rescued the human scientist identified as Dr. Tariel Nuna. Dr. Nuna spent a week or so in our medical facility recovering from severe head and spinal injuries. Later we learned she'd come to meet with Doctor Rolstoi—our resident exobiologist here to study Walin III's aquatic lifeforms.

"When she was fit enough to walk, Dr. Nuna informed us that she had been assigned by Insight to infiltrate VoidCorp. She had brought with her an alien archive recovered by VoidCorp from deep space, which we found intact among the wreckage of her shuttlecraft.

"Nuna and Rolstoi began analyzing the datapad. Insight had been contacted, and a ship was en route to escort the scientists and their "project" safely back to Karnath. Before the escort arrived, the station was attacked and boarded by VoidCorp commandos. During the assault, Dr. Nuna and Dr. Rolstoi escaped aboard one of the station's aquatic shuttles.

"Leading the commandos was an man who spoke on VoidCorp's behalf. He accused Insight of industrial espionage. I told this man that Dr. Nuna was no longer aboard the station, and that's when he ordered us confined to the medical facility and sedated."

Augustine believes Nuna and Rolstoi are hidden somewhere on the planet below. Given the opportunity, he recommends that the heroes and his crew secure the station and use its communication system to contact the aquatic shuttle and ascertain the scientists' present status (see **Objective 10**).

If the heroes are having difficulty thwarting Teliko Sato, Augustine might assist by helping them take the SCC (area **25**). From there they can seize control of all

Javier Augustine [Zero Shock]

Human Combat Spec, Level 3, Insight

STR	11	[+1]	**INT**	9	
DEX	9		**WIL**	9	
CON	10		**PER**	12	[+1]
Durability: 10/10/5/5			Action check: 10+/9/4/2		
Move: sp 20, ru 12, wa 4			# Actions: 2		
Reaction score: Marginal/2			Last resorts: 2 (1 spent)		

Attacks

Unarmed	11/5/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
Stutter pistol*	12/6/3	d6+2s/d8+2s/d8+4s	LI/O

Defenses

Battle jacket* d8 (LI), d4+2 (HI), d4 (En)

Suggested Skills

Athletics [11]; Modern [9]—*pistol 3, rifle 1*; Vehicle Operation [9]—*land 2, space 3*; Stamina [10]—*endurance 2*; Knowledge [9]—*computer operation 2*; Security [9]—*protection protocols 3, devices 2*; System Operation [9]—*communication 2, defenses 1, weapons 2*; Administration [9]; Awareness [9]—*intuition 3*; Interaction [12]; Leadership [12]—*command 4, inspire 3*.

Suggested Equipment

None while captured; normally, Augustine has access to virtually anything on the station.

* These items can be obtained from a weapons locker in the station's Military Quarter.

Starstation Aurora Personnel [7]

Human Tech Op, Level 1, Insight

STR	9		**INT**	11	[+1]
DEX	11	[+1]	**WIL**	9	
CON	9		**PER**	11	
Durability: 9/9/5/5			Action check: 12+/11/5/2		
Move: sp 20, ru 12, wa 4			# Actions: 2		
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			Last resorts: 2 (1 spent)		

Attacks

Unarmed	9/4/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
Stutter pistol*	11/5/2	d6+2s/d8+2s/d8+4s	LI/O

Defenses

Battle jacket* d8 (LI), d4+2 (HI), d4 (En)

Suggested Skills

Use the pregenerated skill lists from Chapter 6 of the *Player's Handbook* for doctors, engineers, hackers and pilots. For the chemists, include the Physical Science—*chemistry* skill.

Suggested Equipment

None. (As Augustine above.)

Teliko Sato [ND771 RIV31]

Human Tech Op, Level 4, VoidCorp

STR	8		**INT**	14 [+2]
DEX	12 [+1]		**WIL**	9
CON	8		**PER**	9
Durability: 8/8/4/4			Action check: 14+/13/6/3	
Move: sp 20, ru 12, wa 4			# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			Last resorts: 1	

Attacks

Unarmed	8/4/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
Stutter pistol	12/6/3	d6+2s/d8+2s/d8+4s	LI/O

Defenses

CF long coat d4+1 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d6–1 (En)

Suggested Skills

Athletics [8]; Modern [12]—*pistol 1*; Vehicle [12]—*land 2, space 2*; Computer Science [14]—*computer hardware 3*; Knowledge [14]—*computer operation 3, first aid 2*; Life Science [14]—*biology 3, genetics 3*; Physical Science [14]—*astronomy 2, chemistry 4, physics 3, planetology 1*; System Operation [14]—*communication 1, sensors 1*; Administration [9]—*management 2*; Awareness [9]—*perception 3*; Investigation [9]—*interrogate 2*; Leadership [9]—*command 2*.

Suggested Equipment

Comm gear, vacuum mask.

VoidCorp Computer Technicians [2]

Human Tech Op, Level 2, VoidCorp

STR	8		**INT**	14 [+2]
DEX	12 [+1]		**WIL**	7
CON	10		**PER**	9
Durability: 10/10/5/5			Action check: 14+/13/6/3	
Move: sp 20, ru 12, wa 4			# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			Last resorts: 1	

Attacks

Unarmed	8/4/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O

Defenses

CF short coat d4 (LI), d4 (HI), d6–2 (En)

Suggested Skills

Athletics [8]; Manipulation [12]; Vehicle [12]—*land 1*; Stamina [10]; Computer Science [14]—*hacking 3, computer hardware 2*; Knowledge [14]—*computer operation 4*; Navigation [14]—*drivespace 1, system 2*; Physical Science [14]—*astronomy 1, planetology 2*; Security [14]—*protection protocols 3, devices 3*; Awareness [7]; Interaction [9]—*bargain 1*.

Suggested Equipment

Comm gear, computer toolkit.

station systems. This requires a successful Computer—*hacking* skill check and a Security—*protection protocols* skill check. If Sato is still controlling key systems from area **17**, he tries to counter the heroes' efforts, imposing a +1 step penalty to their skill checks. If Sato loses control of the station, he makes his escape (see **Objective 13**).

The other surviving personnel include the station's chief medical officer, his assistant, the chief water extraction engineer, two regular maintenance engineers, and two chemists (all humans). All other station personnel, save those aboard the shuttle, are dead.

Objective 9: Secure the Station

If Teliko Sato loses four or more VoidCorp goons, he instructs his technicians in the SCC (area **25**) to recall the aquatic shuttle searching for Dr. Nuna. The shuttle requires 20 minutes to return to the shuttle bay (or one of the station's locking pads). Otherwise they must enter using e-suits and zero-g webs and board the station through bulkhead hatches positioned near the locking pads.

The two goons in the shuttle have stats, skills, and equipment similar to their comrades (see page 25).

If the heroes are all stunned, incapacitated or killed, the VoidCorp goons take all but one of the survivors to the medical facility in the Residential Quarter (area **6**), strap them to medical beds, and sedate them. Two security robots are stationed near the chamber's exits as guards while Sato endeavors to complete his mission.

Sato remains in the ASCC until its security is compromised, at which point he moves to the Shuttle Control Center after routing all primary station functions to the SCC's terminals and activating the mainframe's Surge (attack) program. Anyone interfacing with the ASCC's terminals in area **17** must make a successful Computer Science—*hacking* skill check or be subjected to an intense energy surge inflicting d12+2s damage.

If the SCC has already fallen and Sato is forced to flee the ASCC, he retreats to the gunship docked at Locking Pad 3 and tries to make good his escape, not bothering to wait for straggling commandos. If Sato escapes in the *LKA 444*, heroes can pursue him using their own vessel provided it wasn't damaged. If the heroes pursue Sato, proceed with **Objective 13**.

The two technicians assigned to the SCC (area **25**) remain at their posts until Teliko Sato instructs them otherwise. They are awaiting the return of the shuttle sent down to find Dr. Nuna and the missing alien datapad. They are also rebuilding and reprogramming one of the station's damaged security robots. Neither technician is armed, and neither is important enough to use as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Sato.

Objective 10: Contact Scientists

The aquatic shuttle containing Dr. Nuna, Dr. Rolstoi, and the pilot is hidden under Walin III's thick ice floes. The shuttle's life support enables them to remain underwater for approximately 720 hours. Using Dr. Rolstoi's knowledge of the indigenous life in Walin III's oceans, the pilot has reconfigured the shuttle's systems to emit a signal similar to that of a whale, masking the shuttle.

A VoidCorp villain meets his bloody end aboard Starstation Aurora.

Assuming the heroes can secure either the ASCC or SCC, anyone with the System Operation—*communications* skill can use the station's uplink to send a radio signal to the aquatic shuttle. The skill check suffers a +1 step penalty due to the shuttle's present depth. A single hero may make a new check every 10 minutes. Even if they receive a radio signal from the station, Dr. Nuna and Dr. Rolstoi do not respond until convinced the signal was sent by Insight personnel. Any hero who makes a successful Interaction skill check with a +1 step penalty convinces the scientists to respond. Once they realize that the station is secure, Nuna and Rolstoi set a course back to the station's shuttle bay. The shuttle requires approximately 30 minutes to return to the station.

In its present location, the chances of actually locating the shuttle using ship or station sensors is remote. Finding the shuttle requires a System Operation—*sensors* skill check with a +5 step penalty. A new check may be made each hour. If the heroes take the second science shuttle into low orbit around the planet, the step penalty is reduced to +4. At the Gamemaster's discretion, a hero who makes a successful Life Science—*zoology* or Physical Science—*planetology* skill check can reduce the penalty by –1 step per skill level. (This accounts for the hero's ability to cut through the planetary interference or recognize that the shuttle might be masking its signal as that of a whale.)

Teliko Sato's Ploy

If the heroes were defeated and captured by the VoidCorp commandos, or if they surrender willingly, one of them will be stripped of gear and taken to see Teliko Sato. Sato holds the hero at gunpoint until reinforcements return from the planet's surface. Using the station's sensors, Sato eventually locates the missing science shuttle and contacts the scientists, but he needs the hero to convince Nuna and Rolstoi that it's safe to return. If the hero questions Sato about his mission, he responds as follows:

"One of our xenologists, LU292 NKI47, stole some technology from us, and I've been assigned to retrieve it intact. I suspect that Dr. Nuna is somewhere beneath the planet's surface in one of the station's aquatic shuttlecraft, but the dense ice floes make it exceedingly difficult to locate her. I've reconfigured the station's sensors to scan the planet meter by meter, and it's only a matter of time before we find her.

"When the time comes, I need you to convince Dr. Nuna that it's safe to return to the station—that VoidCorp has been driven from the Walin system by a counter-insurgent team. Idle threats won't work. Dr. Nuna's profile suggests that she values her work above the lives of others, and it's highly unlikely she will surrender herself to save the lives of station personnel. I'm hoping that you see things more humanely. If our endeavor proves successful, I will take back what she stole from us and leave the station in

Data Fragments (roll 1d20)

1. A formal greeting that loosely translates to "Let the stars carry this message of peace to all the intelligent species in the galaxy: We, the people of the Rakon Fusion, greet you."

2. A treatise listing the primary laws of the Rakon Fusion, which reveals the Fusion to be a harmonious, communal society dedicated to mathematical, scientific, and artistic pursuits.

3. Chemical schematics for a universal radiation vaccine.

4. The Hymn of Q'uabal, anthem of the Rakon Fusion.

5. A genetic and biological profile of the Rakon: trilateral, egg-shaped silicates with three equatorial, tentacle-like appendages (arms) and three stumpy legs.

6. A Rakon recipe that reads more like a metallurgical list of complex crystalline formations. (The Rakon live on a diet of cultivated mineral crystals.)

7. A doctrine on Rakon triangle art. (The triangle is described as the Rakon symbol for creation. A silver triangle is also the emblem of the Rakon Fusion.)

8. A geological analysis of Q'uabal, the Rakon homeworld. Poisonous gases in the planet's atmosphere make it unsuitable for human colonization.

9. A list of Rakon mathematical theorems, including three that closely resemble the Pythagorean Theorem, the Trigonometric Cosine Law, and the Isosceles Triangle Theorem.

10. Selected passages from the Qurum, the Rakon Fusion's primary religious codex (equivalent to the Bible on Earth). The codex emphasizes peace and unity and also alludes to the Rakon belief in an afterlife.

11. Schematics for the Rakon Fusion's first interplanetary rocket. The unmanned vessel was fueled by a solid crystalline propellant called xaqallite.

12. A constellation chart pinpointing the location of all Rakon worlds relative to the Galactic Concord.

13. All nine symbols of the Rakon zodiac, each symbol representing a Facet in the Rakon calendar year.

14. A table of Rakon units of measurement. The primary unit of distance is the rillaar, measuring approximately 0.667 meters.

15. A interplanetary survey showing the geological composition of twelve worlds within the Rakon Fusion.

16. Three samples of Rakon triglyphic poetry. Each poem is three symbols, each exemplifying a sharp sense of imagery. The first loosely translates to:

As suns rise
Joyous eyes
Behold the endless light.

17. Technical schematics for a stellar converter, a mechanical device capable of absorbing and focusing intense solar energy. The Rakon use this as their primary power source, but it could easily be mistaken for a weapon.

18. A structural composite of a self-replicating quartz lattice indigenous to the Rakon homeworld.

19. A lexicon of terms for learning the Rakon language. Since the Rakon have three tongues, many of their words are virtually unpronounceable.

20. A technical schematic of a Rakon trinary computer language (similar to human binary code) using three basic symbols.

peace. I have no desire to inflict further harm upon you or captured station personnel, but I have no qualms about doing so if my demands are not met."

If the hero fails to cooperate, Sato threatens to eliminate his comrades or certain station personnel. If this doesn't work, Sato executes the belligerent hero and instead revives Augustine, posing the same threat to him. (Augustine will have little choice but to lure the scientists back to the station.)

Fooling Dr. Nuna requires a successful Deception skill check with a +1 penalty. If the attempt fails, Sato expresses impatience and informs Nuna that he'll exterminate all Insight personnel unless she surrenders the datapad. Although Nuna is willing to sacrifice everyone aboard the station to protect the alien archive, Rolstoi is not. He orders the shuttle pilot to return to the station, giving in to VoidCorp's demands.

If Sato obtains the alien datapad, he leaves the station aboard the VoidCorp assault ship, and the mission is over. If both the *Grifter* and the *LKA 444* are crippled or destroyed, Sato uses the station's communications relay to summon another VoidCorp transport which arrives in 10 days. Either way the heroes have failed, and the mission ends unhappily.

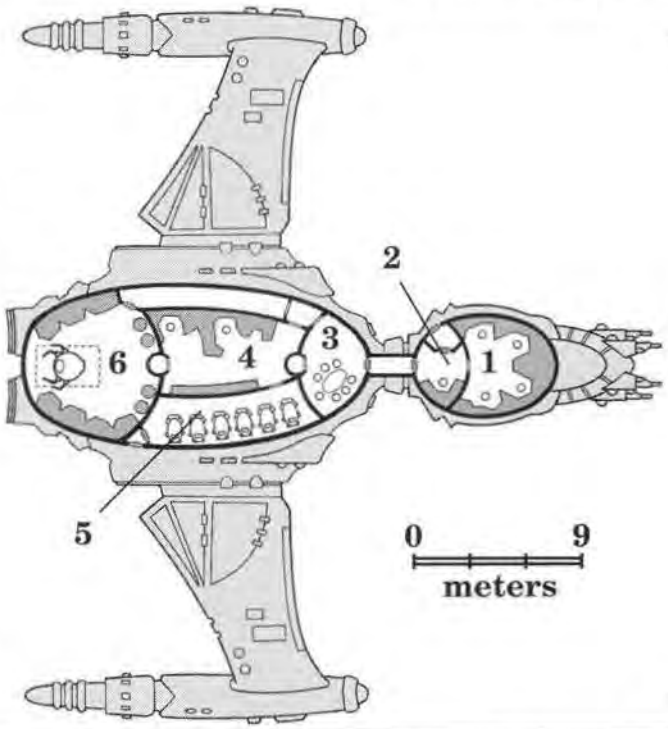
Objective 11: Question Dr. Nuna

Dr. Nuna refuses to discuss the alien datapad over the radio comm-link. If she returns to the station and isn't killed by Teliko Sato, heroes may question her. She is willing to reveal the following information. If the heroes are assertive or antagonistic toward her, Dr. Nuna will only divulge information if the heroes make a successful Investigate—*interrogate* skill check.

"I conduct scientific espionage for Insight. I was stationed aboard a VoidCorp science vessel when our sensors detected unusual energy emanating from a cloud of space debris. Within this cloud we discovered a small storage device containing fragments of knowledge from an unknown alien culture. Upon making this discovery, we set a course back toward the Strome system and availed ourselves of the opportunity to study the datapad more closely.

"I managed to decipher one of the archive's data fragments—a short but complex string of notes. Later we unlocked a second data fragment that provided technical schematics—for what, we could not ascertain. By this time, I had already formulated a plan to steal the archive and return it safely to Insight—if only to keep VoidCorp from exploiting this new alien species.

LKA 444



Vanguard-class Assault Ship

The *LKA 444*

Vanguard-class Assault Ship (Military)

Compartments:	8	Durability:	40
Maneuver rating:	0	Acceleration:	2 Mpp/phase
Cruise speed:	1.5 AU/hour	Berthing:	16

Armament: Plasma cannon (Range 4/8/16 Mm) d6+2w/d8+2w/d6+1m [En(e)]; Launch rack w/ 8 CHE missiles (8/16/24) d8s/d6+1w/d4+1m [LI(g)]

Defenses: Chaff dispenser

Armor: Moderate neutronite (2 dur) d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6 (En)

Computer: Ordinary computer core, Ordinary battle, defense, engineering, and navigation dedicated computers

Engines: Induction engine

Power: Mass reactor rated for 20 power factors

Drive: 10 light-years per starfall

1. Command Center. The cockpit has stations for the pilot, as well as stations for the plasma cannon, navigation, communication, and defenses.

2. Life Support Station. Behind the control station is the forward airlock and a compartment containing five e-suits (hard). This airlock connects with the access corridor to Locking Pad 3 of the station.

3. Galley. A narrow turbolift leads up to area **7**.

4. Engineering. Using comm gear to eavesdrop on events happening aboard the station is a VoidCorp commando, normally stationed here. He moves between this area and the cockpit.

5. Sleep Pods. This area contains twelve oval sleep pods (bunkbed formation) joined by a series of power conduits. Sleep pods are designed for comfort and relaxation and, during long journeys, serve as stasis chambers. Individual terminals mounted at the foot of each "bed" monitor the heart beat and brainwave patterns of anyone sleeping in the life support capsule. Next to the airlock is a locker containing two soft e-suits with vacuum masks and magnetic boots.

6. Maintenance. This area contains the ship's computer core, damage control and defense systems. Suspended above a cargo door is a one-man workpod with four manipulative arms, each one fitted with a powered tool to aid with external repairs.

7. Upper Deck. In addition to the secondary engineering consoles, this chamber contains computer systems for the vessel's two missile launch racks, mounted on the dorsal and ventral sections of the hull.

Roll	Compartment	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
1–4	Command	Plasma cannon (2/3)	12/12/6
		Chaff (1/0)	
		Multiband radar (1/0)	
		EM detector (0/0)	
		Ordinary computer core (1/0)	
		Laser transceiver (0/1)	
		Radio transceiver (0/1)	
		Airlock (1/0)	
5–8	Engineering I	Induction engine (4/4)	14/14/7
		Stardrive (3/*)	
9–11	Engineering II	Mass reactor (4/*)	16/16/8
		Workshop (2/0)	
		Damage control (2/0)	
12–13	Crew	Crew quarters (2/0)	4/4/2
14–15	Auxiliary	Mass reactor (4/*)	12/12/6
		Escape pod (2/0)	
		Autosupport (0/2)	
13–14	Weapons I	Launch rack* (2/1)	8/8/4
15–16	Weapons II	Launch rack* (2/1)	8/8/4
17–20	Cargo	Cargo space (2/0)	6/6/3
		Workpod hangar (1/0)	

* Each launch rack holds four CHE missiles.

Tariel Nuna [Madame Exo] formerly LU292 NK147

Human Tech Op, Level 4, Insight exobiologist

STR	7	**INT**	13	[+2]
DEX	10	**WIL**	12	[+1]
CON	9	**PER**	8	

Durability: 9/9/5/5 — Action check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: sp 16, ru 10, wa 4 — # Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2 — Last resorts: 1

Attacks

Unarmed	7/3/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O

Suggested Skills

Athletics [7]; Vehicle [10]—*space 2*; Stamina [9]; Computer Science [13]—*hacking 3*; Knowledge [13]—*computer operation 4, cryptography 5*; Life Science [13]—*biology 4, xenology 5*; Navigation [13]—*drivespace 1, system 2*; Physical Science [13]—*astronomy 1, physics 4, planetology 2*; Security [13]—*protection protocols 1*; System Operation [13]—*communications 2, sensors 1*; Technical Science [13]; Awareness [12]— *perception 1*; Deception [8]—*bluff 2*; Interaction [8].

Suggested Equipment

Alien datapad, computer gauntlet.

Yuri Rolstoi [Sci Lord]

Human Tech Op, Level 5, Insight exobiologist

STR	9	**INT**	14	[+2]
DEX	10	**WIL**	10	
CON	8	**PER**	9	

Durability: 8/8/4/4 — Action check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: sp 18, ru 12, wa 4 — # Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2 — Last resorts: 1

Attacks

Unarmed	9/4/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O

Suggested Skills

Athletics [9]; Vehicle [10]; Stamina [8]; Computer Science [14]—*computer hardware 3*; Knowledge [14]—*computer operation 2, linguistics 5*; Life Science [14]—*biology 4, xenology 4*; Medical Science [14]—*xenomedicine 3*; Physical Science [14]—*chemistry 3, physics 3*; System Operation [14]—*communication 1, sensors 2*; Awareness [10]—*perception 3*; Resolve [10]; Interaction [9]—*bargain 1*; Leadership [9]—*inspire 1*.

Suggested Equipment

Personal slate computer.

Jada Garrett [Skimmer]

Human Tech Op, Level 1, Insight shuttle pilot

Jada has stats similar to other Aurora Station personnel (see page 27). For skills, use the pregenerated Tech Op—Pilot profile from Chapter 6 of the *Player's Handbook*.

"I persuaded two of my colleagues to betray VoidCorp and accompany me back to Insight space. They created a computer virus that disabled the science ship's security systems, affording us the opportunity to escape aboard a driveship shuttle. Our shuttle's systems malfunctioned, and we crashed. The station personnel were unable to save the fraal. I alone survived.

"My plan was to meet with Dr. Rolstoi, a former colleague. Yuri is a renowned xenologist. I knew him from the Radix Institute, and I knew from our last correspondence that Yuri had been hired by Insight to conduct a zoological survey of Walin III's aquatic lifeforms. I gambled that he would assist me in deciphering the remainder of the datapad. We had only begun to analyze it when the VoidCorp strike team attacked."

The alien archive rarely leaves Dr. Nuna's custody. If the heroes attempt to analyze the archive, proceed with **Objective 12.** If the heroes take Dr. Nuna and/or the alien datapad back to Karnath, proceed with **Objective 13.**

Objective 12: Analyze Alien Datapad

After neutralizing the VoidCorp threat, heroes might find time to study the alien archive. The datapad itself is composed of unknown materials and is extremely resilient, capable of functioning in zero-g, ultra-humid and frigid environments. There are ports set into the rim of the datapad so that the information can be downloaded into a mainframe, but the ports are not compatible with most known technology. (VoidCorp and Insight each has a PL 7 computer sophisticated enough to interface with the archive.) The datapad has a built-in keyboard for calling up information. All information is stored in a complex alien language that has not yet been deciphered.

The datapad contains an entire library about a previously unknown (and clearly intelligent) alien species known as the Rakon. Accessing the Rakon archive requires the Computer Science—*hacking* skill and either Knowledge—*cryptography* or Knowledge—*linguistics*. (These are unique skills.) Two separate skill checks with a +4 penalty to each are required to unlock or decipher a single fragment of the archive. Each successful translation yields one data fragment. (See sidebar on page 30 for details.)

Objective 13: Pursue *LKA 444*

The heroes need only complete this objective if Teliko Sato manages to escape aboard his gunship. If Sato is captured or killed aboard the station, skip this section.

The *LKA 444* is more than a match for the heroes' transport. However, the gunship requires a separate crewman for each of its two weapons and at least one person to pilot the ship. Depending on the number of goons aboard, the assault ship will either stand and fight or turn tail and run. If the ship has three or more crewmen aboard and at least one possesses the System Operation—*weapons* skill, the *LKA 444* stays and fights. Otherwise, it heads back to the Strome system.

Teliko Sato assumes the pilot's station while one of his goons mans the mass cannon station. If a space battle with the *Grifter* seems imminent, a third commando mans

the launch racks. Once it commits to battle, the gunship fights until destroyed. Should the *LKA 444* lose its weapon systems, however, Sato gives the order to flee. If Sato has the opportunity, he uses his System Operation—*communication* skill to contact the heroes, taunting them with threats of their imminent demise or vowing to destroy them another day.

Spaceship combat is detailed in the *Gamemaster Guide*. All VoidCorp commandos have the Tactics skill, and any commando in the Command compartment (see "The *LKA 444*" sidebar) can use this skill to gain a tactical advantage over the enemy ship. A successful use of the skill provides a penalty to the opponent's next skill check. (See skill description for details.) Heroes may employ similar tactics against the *LKA 444*.

Any hero with the Leadership broad skill can exert his influence over their crew, affording a –1 bonus to all crew actions during that round and the following round. However, only those crewmen in direct contact with their leader can benefit from his leadership. Teliko Sato possesses the Leadership—*command* skill, allowing him to modify his crew's action checks by –2.

Completing the Mission

If the heroes defeat the VoidCorp strike team, their task is complete. They may return to Karnath and file a report with Yoshiko. If the *Grifter* was crippled or destroyed, the heroes may either commandeer the *LKA 444* or use the station's communications relay to inform Insight of the present situation and ask them to send another ship. Starstation Aurora's shuttles are not rigged with stardrive technology and cannot make the journey.

Once the Rakon archive is deciphered, Insight might request that the heroes accompany a small group of diplomats to Rakon space to initiate first contact procedures. Due to the secrecy of this operation, Insight sends only one innocuous transport. An Inseer Mindwalker assigned to the vessel ensures that no spies from rival stellar nations are smuggled aboard the transport.

The Rakon Fusion lies somewhere on the edge of the Verge, and the journey could take weeks or months. A number of events could happen in that time. VoidCorp might intercept the Insight transport as it heads toward uncharted space. An accident on board the transport could leave the heroes and the Inseers stranded on some uncharted planet on the Verge, placing them at the mercy of whoever or whatever dwells there.

If Insight reaches Rakon space, the Rakon welcomes the Inseers with open pseudopods. The friendly silicates have hundreds of deep space probes scouring the galaxy for signs of alien life. (The datapad recovered by Dr. Nuna came from a probe destroyed by a collision with a small asteroid.) They are eager to trade technology for the promise of peaceful co-existence and galactic harmony. They attach quickly to the good-natured t'sa but are somewhat in awe of the brutish yet enlightened weren.

What happens when the heroes finally encounter the Rakon is left to the Gamemaster. The Rakon have the equivalent of PL 8 technology. Although they have no weapons, stellar nations could use the Rakon technology to advance weapons research "back home." Ω

The Rakon

The Rakon are a gentle race dedicated to artistic pursuits and stellar exploration. Although the Rakon Fusion comprises many worlds, the Rakon lack the perception that space is threatening, and they have yet to encounter another species of comparable intelligence, let alone one bent on galactic domination. They are a unified people with no concept of war or strife.

To their credit, the Rakon have created an ingenious and industrious society capable of thinking its way out of most problems. Thousands of Rakon working in concert can erect an entire city in days, which explains why they've spread across the galaxy so rapidly.

Rakon are physically dense, standing 1.5 meters tall and weighing 150 kilograms. Their soft, gelatinous innards are enclosed by a dull, crystalline carapace. They have three tentacle-like pseudopods ending in three digits. Their sense of touch is extremely fine, and they enjoy experiencing new textures. Each Rakon has three eyes evenly spaced around the upper half of its ovoid body. The mouth is also located on the top of the creature. The Rakon is completed by three stumpy, trunk-like legs jutting out of its underbelly.

Rakon are contemplative, forgiving, and intensely curious. The have a heightened appreciation for architecture, mathematical achievements, and food. They prefer a healthy diet of crystalline composites but can eat just about anything with mineral nutrients. They revere the number 3 and are naturally superstitious in things that come in threes, or items possessing a three-sided composition. They are builders, always creating things for the sheer pleasure of being creative.

Rakon in the Star*Drive Campaign

The Rakon Fusion lies somewhere beyond the Verge. Once contact is established with the Fusion, it is possible for Rakon heroes to join the Star*Drive campaign.

Rakon heroes can be Diplomats, Free Agents, Tech Ops, and Mindwalkers. There are no Rakon Combat Specs, as combat runs counter to the Rakon philosophy. Rakon heroes have the following ability score limits: STR 4–14, DEX 4–10, CON 6–14, INT 4–14, WIL 4–14, PER 4–12. They receive the following free broad skills: Stamina, Knowledge, Physical Science, Creativity, and Culture.

Special Abilities

✦ ***Immunity to Poison:*** The Rakon physiology is impervious to all known poisons of liquid or gaseous nature. Many of their worlds have ammonia atmospheres that do not trouble the Rakon in the least.

✦ ***Innate Creativity:*** The Rakon receive a –1 step bonus to any Creativity skill or creative task including Computer Science—*hacking*, Medical Science—*surgery*, and Technical Science—*juryrig*. As inventors, they have many traits in common with the t'sa.

✦ ***Passive Nature:*** When purchasing skills normally reserved for Combat Specs, Rakon heroes must pay an additional skill point per skill level.

STARSTATION AURORA

The space station is divided into nine sections: the extractor hub, four radial pylons (Locking Pads 1–3 and Shuttle Bay), and four habitat quarters (Military, Command, Science and Residential).

The station has few remote computer terminals; most are localized in key areas such as the Command Center (area **17**), medical facilities (areas **6** and **21**), science labs, and the Shuttle Control Center (area **25**). Although there are terminals in the rooms adjacent to the locking pad, these are relegated to handling docking functions such as refueling, workpod deployment, cargo drone deployment, and water loading.

The Hub

1. Water Extractor. The station's water extractor uses a pulsating blue particle beam to siphon water vapor from Walin III's upper atmosphere. The vapor is stored in condensers located in the radial pylon directly behind the shuttle bay (area **23**). Pipes built into the station's infrastructure can pump the water to awaiting transports docked at any of the station's three locking pads.

When the extractor is operational, the central hub is air-sealed and inaccessible. Double airlocks leading to the adjacent control rooms ensure that the rest of the station is not depressurized.

Locking Pads

Ships docking at Aurora Station must do so at one of three docking pylons. The locking pads can service vessels as large as bulk transports or as small as shuttlecraft. Grapples secure the vessel safely to the hull while a flexible, vacuum-sealed hatchway connects directly to the ship's external airlock. Most of the routine functions are performed by utility robots. Aside from the docking control stations, the locking pads primarily serve as storage areas for bulky station supplies. Many of the larger rooms and corridors are equipped with surveillance cameras.

2. Storage Facilities. These rooms contain mechanical equipment: cutting torches, portable generators, instrument packs, mass neutralizers, portable workshops, survey gear, and toolkits. There are also deployable cargo boxes containing survival gear: magnetic boots, emergency beacons, soft and hard e-suits, habitat domes, portable heaters, first aid kits, flashlights, jumpsuits, inflatable rafts, respirator masks, vacuum masks, water condensers, water purifiers, and zero-g webs.

3. Workpods. Each of these one-man thruster pods is equipped with two hydraulic arms equipped with an assortment of electronically controlled tools. The workpods can be deployed to work on the station's outer hull or repair damage to ships docking at any of the station's locking pads. Each workpod has a life support system capable of sustaining its occupant for 72 hours.

Residential Quarter

Most of the unmarked chambers in this quarter are private cabins set aside for station visitors. At the moment, all of these chambers are unoccupied. Several rooms are equipped with their own three-man lifepods built into the floor of the station.

4. Colonnade. Lockers built along the inner wall of this corridor contain emergency e-suits (soft) and first aid kits, while set into the floor are eight access ports leading to emergency three-man lifepods. Televid monitors flicker blindly along the outer wall.

5. Virtual Reality Chambers. These rooms are equipped with state-of-the-art virtual reality units capable of generating lifelike images of people, objects and landscapes. They are designed to be interactive, and several programs have been installed in the computer for the user's amusement. Each room comes equipped with two virtual reality helmets which must be worn during the simulation. Tiny electrodes inside the cap interface directly with the user's brain, creating vivid and real interactions. Station personnel use these chambers to relax, train and interact in unusual settings (from jazz nightclubs to combat simulations).

6. Medical Facility. This sickbay comes equipped with nine medical beds equipped with restraining fields and medical scanners. Two utility (medical) robots are assigned to the facility as medical assistants.

Storage compartments built into the walls contain a variety of medical gear: first aid kits, forensic kits, life support packs, medical gauntlets, pharmaceuticals (anesthetics, antibiotics, antiradiation serums, antivenoms, coagulants, sedatives and stimulants), surgical kits, and trauma packs.

Attached to this facility is a smaller office for the station's chief medical officer. The office contains a desk equipped with a desktop terminal containing a full medical database. Anyone using the database as a resource applies a –1 step bonus to relevant Medical Science skill checks.

7. Residential Lounge. This comfortable chamber is furnished with a bar and several tables. The tables come equipped with built-in holoviewers programmed with various games such as chess. Oval windows afford a brilliant view of outer space and the planet below.

Situated behind the bar is Screwdriver (Unit AI-344), a service robot programmed to serve alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages.

Science Quarter

Many of the laboratories located in this quarter are equipped with the most advanced technology available, while the rest remain empty due to corporate cutbacks.

When the VoidCorp goons attacked the station, they opened fire on several station personnel in this quarter. Walls and consoles are m with blast marks, a handful of security cameras were blown out, corpses lie strewn in the corridors, and many of the laboratories have been thoroughly ransacked.

8. Colonnade. Lockers built along the wall contain emergency e-suits (soft), while set into the floor are eight access ports leading to emergency three-man lifepods.

9. Arboretum and Hydroponics Lab. Three of the chambers in this quarter are used as greenhouses. All three contain flourishing varieties of plant life, most of which is edible. Artificial environments are controlled and monitored from consoles set into the walls.

10. Cafeteria. This area is furnished with tables, chairs, and three electronic food dispensers. A service robot stands on duty, ready to clean tables and provide for visitors' needs.

11. Geolab. This facility is equipped with sophisticated computers designed to analyze metal fibers and alloys as well as mineral composites of various kinds. Anyone who needs to analyze geological readings or a planetary survey can use this equipment and receive a –1 step bonus to Physical Science—*planetology* and Knowledge skill checks.

12. Exobiology Lab. To enter this lab, heroes must step through a sterilization chamber. Complete sterilization is necessary when working with alien lifeforms, for which this facility is designed. The lab contains scanning devices that enable scientists to analyze, probe, and even dissect new lifeforms of any shape and size. The lab comes equipped with an exobiological database stored in a desktop terminal. The database contains information on all known species. Anyone using this lab for exobiological studies receives a –1 step bonus to all Life Science skill checks.

13. Chemlab. This lab contains equipment designed to analyze and contain all know chemical elements and compounds. Three smaller chambers at the back of the lab are designed to house chemicals considered too rare or volatile to store openly. The facility comes equipped with an extensive chemical database built into a desktop terminal. Anyone studying chemical compounds receives a –1 step bonus to her Physical Science—*chemistry* skill check when using the available equipment.

14. Cyberlab. This facility is equipped with three transparent stasis cylinders, all of which are monitored and controlled from a desktop terminal. Two of the units are functional, capable of holding a living organism in stasis for up to two weeks. Due to the exorbitant costs of obtaining the necessary patents and contracts, Insight has been unable to equip the station with cybernetic specialists or provide the equipment needed to make this facility fully operational.

Command Quarter

The Command Quarter sustained moderate damage during the commando raid on the station. There are blast marks, blown terminals, and slain station personnel in the rooms and corridors.

15. Booby Trap. Teliko Sato and his personnel avoid this corridor. While most of the lockers along the inner wall of this corridor contain emergency e-suits (soft), three of them (marked "x" on the Gamemaster's map) are rigged with explosives connected to proximity motion sensors. Any attempt to move down the corridor causes the explosion to detonate outward (into the corridor), inflicting d8+1w to anyone within 2 meters, d6w to anyone between 2 and 5 meters away, and d4-1w to anyone between 5 and 8 meters away. Disarming the booby traps is possible using the Demolitions—disarm skill. The trick involves scrambling the radio signal between the actual explosive and the attached proximity motion scanner. Only by doing so can the disarmer come close enough to the actual explosive to disconnect it.

Set into the colonnade floor are eight ports leading to emergency three-man lifepods.

16. Power Plants. Each of these chambers contains a massive power plant, one to power the station's artificial gravity generators (area **16a**) and the other to power the station's fusion reactor (area **16b**). The power plants are durable and generally quite safe, and tampering with them requires a successful Technical Science check. On an Amazing or Good result, a hero may successfully shut down the station's gravity generators (creating a zero-g environment) or the reactor core (creating a station-wide power failure). Any other result yields no change in the station's operating status. Both power plants are unaffected by stun damage and can withstand 30 points of wound damage before shutting down. Destroying either plant renders it irreparable. Destroying the reactor plant has a 1 in 4 chance of triggering a cascade failure, obliterating the entire station in d20 minutes.

17. ASCC. All key station operations are controlled from this nexus. If the heroes are close to breaching this chamber, Teliko Sato routes all ASCC functions to the SCC (area **25**) and makes his way to that area via the most direct route. Two security robots stand guard here, reconfigured to obey Sato's commands. Stats for these units are given in the "Robots" sidebar.

The ASCC is huge, with a raised central platform lined with computer terminals and security monitors. The platform juts out from the inside wall and faces a huge video screen built along the station's outer hull. The video screen is usually set to show an outside view of the station but can be adjusted to display a constellation map, a security camera view of the station, or any available broadcast.

The ASCC has eight distinct computer consoles, five of which are located atop the central platform. These five stations control communications, security cameras,

robots, external and internal sensors. The remaining three stations control weapon systems (inoperable), life support and the water extractor. Each console can withstand 8 wound points of damage, but every 2 points of damage inflicted upon a console imposes a –1 step penalty to all skill checks relating to that particular terminal. Accessing a terminal's grid requires the Computer—*computer operations* skill. Marginal success indicates the hero can display information, but a Ordinary result or better is needed to actually reconfigure the system. If Teliko Sato re-routes control to the SCC, heroes can re-establish control by making a successful Computer—*hacking* skill check. Failure triggers a protective energy surge inflicting d12+2s damage to the would-be hacker.

18. Station Mainframe. This chamber houses the station's mainframe computer, utility files and databases. The actual mainframe processor is encased in a magnetic shielding designed to protect it from energy surges, solar flares and dangerous radiation emissions. It cannot be accessed directly. The mainframe is equipped with a variety of computer programs that are fully detailed in Chapter 15 of the *Player's Handbook*. Sample programs might include antivirus (defense), archive (utility), back-up (utility), datafile (utility), encode (defense), entertainment (utility), scan (utility), AI (utility) and enhance (utility).

Military Quarter

Most of the rooms in this quarter have been set aside for military personnel. However, the station presently has no military force assigned to protect it, so most of the rooms are empty. This quarter also contains areas set aside for melee combat training and weapons storage. All areas are accessible to heroes with a gold security card. The station's armories, located in the small chambers outside the military medical facility (area **21**), contain the following hardware and equipment: jumpsuits, vacuum masks, respirator masks, stun batons, stutter pistols, CF softsuits and battle jackets. The weapons are fully loaded, but there's no additional ammo stored here.

19. Colonnade. This corridor is identical to area **4**.

20. Briefing Room. This military briefing room contains seven rows of padded benches, a computerized lectern and electronic starcharts and video screens affixed to panels along the walls.

21. Medical Facility. This fully-operational sickbay contains ten medical beds. The chamber is otherwise similar to area **6**.

Lying on two beds are a pair of dead fraal (Dr. Nuna's former colleagues). Secured to the remaining beds by gravity restraint fields are eight sedated station personnel (see **Objective 8** for details). Reviving them requires a considerable dose of stimulant, administered by someone with the Medical Science skill. Two medical droids are assigned to administer continuous doses of sedative, but they can be ordered to inject the personnel with enough stimulant to revive them, sparing the heroes any need to do so themselves.

In addition to the two medical robots, Teliko Sato has stationed a security robot here to guard the prisoners. Stats for the security and medical robots are given in the "Robots" sidebar.

22. Military Lounge. This comfortably-appointed facility is furnished similarly to area **7**, only it includes a large oval banquet table.

Shuttle Bay

Although this pylon is usually referred to as simply the Shuttle Bay, it serves an even more important function as a facility for storing the vast amounts of water vapor extracted from Walin III's atmosphere by the station's water extraction emitters.

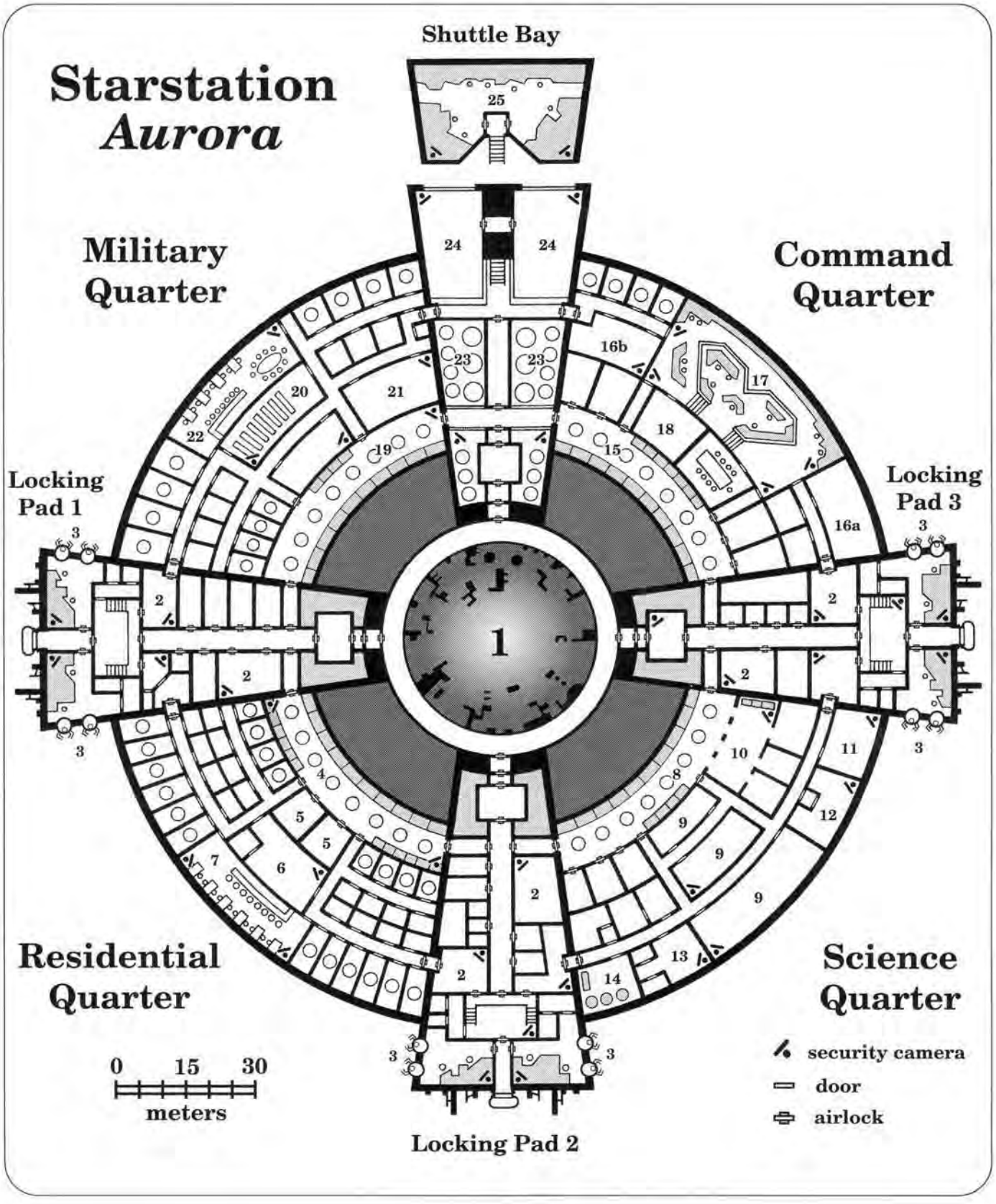
23. Water Storage. This area is taken up by dozens of large, cylindrical condensers. Water vapor extracted from the planet's atmosphere is stored and condensed inside these durable metal tanks. Pipes woven through the station's infrastructure pumps water to the station's locking pads, where the water is then transferred to docked freighters for transport to nearby worlds.

24. Shuttle Pad. One of the station's shuttles was taken by Dr. Nuna and Dr. Rolstoi. The second shuttle carrying five VoidCorp goons was dispatched to search the wreckage of Dr. Nuna's shuttle that crash landed atop a glacier near the planet's polar ice cap.

The shuttle bay doors are controlled from the SCC (area **25**). Shuttles may also dock at any of the station's available locking pads. Opening the shuttle bay doors would normally expose the hangar to the cold void of space. The hangar must decompress for 10 seconds before the outer doors are opened, or everything loose in the hangar is blown out into space.

A metal staircase positioned between the two shuttle docking pads leads up to the SCC (area **25**).

25. SCC. The Shuttle Control Center is normally monitored by the two VoidCorp computer technicians. They are in constant communication with the shuttle containing the VoidCorp search team sent to find Dr. Nuna and Dr. Rolstoi on the planet's surface. In emergency situations, the SCC terminals can be configured to handle functions normally relegated to the ASCC (area **17**). Security cameras, station sensors, communications, life support and water extraction can all be controlled and monitored from this area, provided control is released from the ASCC; re-routing control requires a successful Computer—*hacking* skill check. Failure triggers a protective energy surge, inflicting d12+2s damage to the hacker. Ω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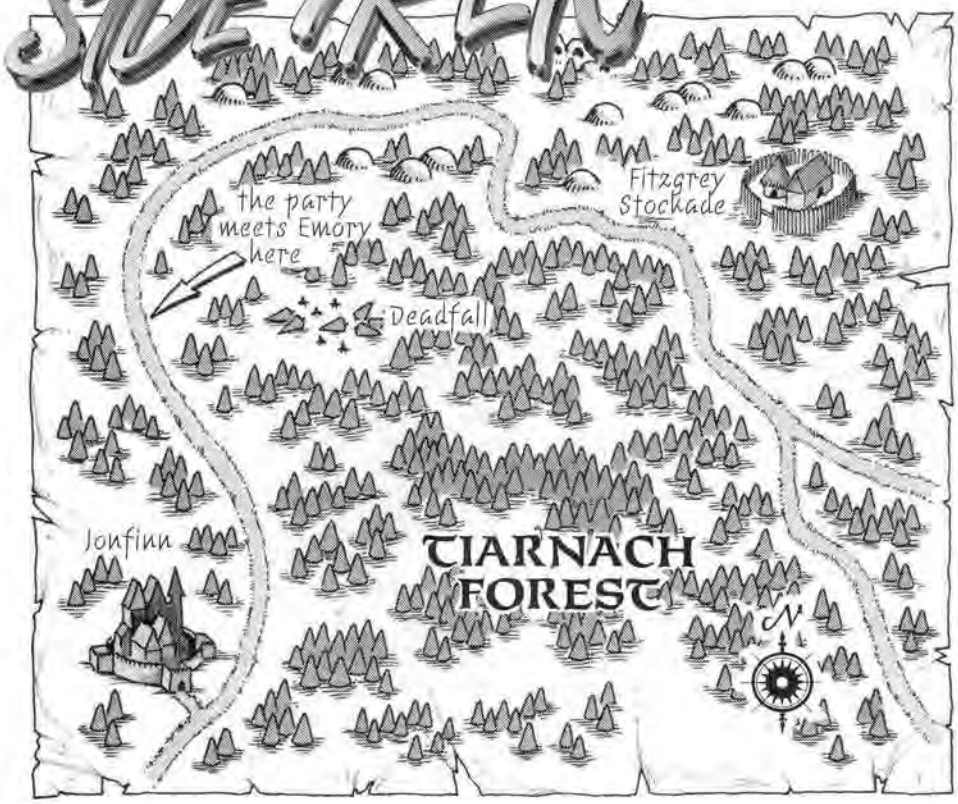


BY DAVID ZENZ

Cartography by Diesel

"One Winter's Night" is an AD&D® SideTrek adventure designed for a party of 4–6 characters of levels 1–2 (about 8 total levels). The adventure takes place as the PCs are either returning to or leaving from a stronghold or small town. The adventure occurs during a winter storm and can be dropped into any campaign set in a northern wilderness during harsh winter. The PCs must be equipped for cold weather traveling. A copy of *Aurora's Whole Realms Catalog* provides several ideas for such equipment. A generous DM might provide the PCs with the rudimentary items. It is also recommended that the PCs have horses.

Adventure Background

The Tiernach Forest is a desolate land of dark, endless pine trees and thick marshes. The forest sits on the northern edge of a temperate zone. Few people reside outside of the northern villages, clinging to urban life. Packed earthen roads link these small communities, but travel upon them is rare especially in the fall and winter. Those who dwell outside the communities are a tough breed of hunters and loggers for whom hardship is a fact of everyday life. Goblins also inhabit the Tiernach Forest. Swift raiders mounted on wolves, they hunt and raid to survive. In the eyes of most villagers, to be caught outside the walled northern towns when the goblins are "on the warpath" spells certain death!

Beginning the Adventure

The town of Jonfinn is provided as a starting point for the adventure but can easily be changed to fit any campaign world. The party might be returning to Jonfinn from a recent adventure or traveling onward to the next challenge. Through no one's fault, the PCs have gotten a late start on the day's travel. During the winter months, the sun sets early, and the temperature drops quickly. If any PC has the weather sense proficiency, that PC senses that it will snow heavily by nightfall (no proficiency roll necessary). The PCs must hurry to find shelter for the night.

As it nears dusk, the PCs hear something crashing through the pine forest. Between the trees, the PCs see a black steed and a rider. The PCs should roll initiative as the rider and mount break from the forest and ride past them. The steed is a large black mule, and riding it bareback at breakneck speed is a blonde boy. The wild-eyed rider is dressed in a woolen shirt, buckskin pants, leather boots, and a tattered cloak. His only weapon is a large hunting knife. The mule is lathered, and its breath is a cloud of steam. As the mule reaches the path, it stumbles in the snow and throws the rider. The boy hits the snow hard with a grunt.

Emory Fitzgrey: AL LG; AC 10; MV 12; 0-level; hp 4; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type (1d4 with hunting knife); S 12, D 14, C 12, I 10, W 9, Ch 11; ML 15; knife, tinder kit, whetstone, ceramic bird whistle, 5 cp.

Mule: AL N; AC 7; MV 12; HD 3; hp 15; THAC0 17; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg 1–2/1–6; SZ M; ML 5; *MM*/194.

Emory is shaken but unhurt from his fall. He looks about 13 years old and stands just over 5 feet tall. He has a skinny, haunted look about him. His hands show that he is used to hard physical work.

Emory urgently explains to the PCs that he must hurry back to Jonfinn to get help. He was cutting wood with his uncle at a deadfall of trees about two miles back in the forest. A trunk split at an odd angle and fell upon his uncle, trapping him beneath its weight. Near the deadfall, they had sighted the tracks of wolves and goblins, which is even greater cause for concern.

Plan of Attack

Around the time the PCs encounter Emory, it begins snowing. If the PCs agree to help the lad, they enter the forest with about three hours before the sun sets. The snow, combined with the shadows underneath the pine trees, creates a dull

ONE WINTER'S NIGHT

haze. Most of the pine trees have few if any branches under the 8' mark. Even though the trees have grown close together, snow does reach the forest floor in large amounts. The snow and the bed of pine needles make travel almost silent. Branches overhead block much of the wind.

The PCs can ride through the forest on horses without any penalties to movement. With Emory on his mule, it takes the group about 30 minutes to locate the trapped woodcutter. Should the party leave the horses behind and walk, it takes them over one hour to navigate the dense forest to find the trapped man. PCs with tracking skills realize that, at the current rate of snowfall, the party's tracks will be obliterated within an hour, making it nearly impossible to retrace the party's steps. Marking trees would prove helpful.

Emory leads the PCs to his uncle by the fastest route. The trail ends amid a deadfall of twisted and toppled trees. (Emory explains that a summer storm ripped through this part of the forest and downed this small cluster of fir trees.)

The old man has been pinned under a huge fir tree with a split trunk. He has been trapped on his back with both legs under the tree. Although he is conscious, he's in a great deal of pain and lapses into periods of unconsciousness. He thanks the PCs upon their arrival and reminds them of the danger, both from the elements and the goblins. "I heard 'em drummin' and howlin' a while back. They're gonna tear through here like wildfire. If you can't yank me free, take the boy an' head for the fort!"

Uncle Gearad Fitzgrey: AL LG; AC 10; MV 12 (0 while trapped, 6 until healed and rested); R8; hp 44 (29 currently); THAC0 12; #AT 2; Dmg by weapon type; SA attack with two weapons; S 14, D 14, C 15, I 14, W 15, Ch 16; ML 17; axe, hunting knife.

Gearad wears a thick quilted shirt and heavy woolen pants. He's a stocky fellow with salt and pepper hair, a short bushy beard, and bushy eyebrows. The PCs could guess his age at around 50 years. Gearad's nearest weapon, a hunting knife, is strapped to his belt (which is trapped under the tree). Nearby lies his equipment including: a drag sled half-filled with cut timber, 150 feet of hemp rope, a 20' square sailcloth tarp, leather saddle bags, a two-person ripsaw, two iron wedges, a rough wool blanket, two shovels, a 10-lb. sledgehammer, a clay jar of grease, 10 torches wrapped in a bundle, a tinder kit, two large axes, three hand axes (hatchets), one cording mallet, two woolen coats, four pairs of leather gloves, a sharpening stone, three loaves of bread, and a yew long bow tied to a quiver of 20 flight arrows.

Freeing Uncle Gearad

Getting Gearad out from under the tree is difficult. The tree weighs about 850 lbs. and is roughly 75' long. The PCs can attempt to lift the tree, lifting up to their combined maximum press (*PHB*/14). Each lever adds 50 lbs. to the total maximum press.

- The mule can be used to help lift the tree with ropes and pulleys, up to 500 lbs.
- Horses can lift 340–520 lbs. depending on the breed and size (see *MM*/194).
- Cutting the limbs off the tree decreases the weight by 200 lbs, and cutting off sections of the tree reduces the load by 75–200 lbs.
- Digging around Uncle Gearad and rocking the tree requires a 600-lb. lift.
- A *levitate* spell reduces the burden by 100 lbs. per level of the caster. Cutting directly to Gearad is dangerous but could be attempted. The PCs might have other ideas.

Ultimately, the DM decides how well creative methods work to free the trapped woodcutter. Moving or shifting the tree might damage Gearad further. Regardless of the method used to free him, the woodcutter sustains 1d8 hp damage, but subtract 1 from the roll for every 200 lbs. of counterweight or "lift" applied to free him.

On the Warpath

As soon as the PCs start to work on freeing Gearad, they hear the distant drums of the goblins and the howls of their wolfen allies. A look of concern crosses Emory's face, and the PCs must work fast to free Gearad. The DM should keep a rough track of time. About one hour after nightfall, the howls stop. A half hour later, the PCs are ambushed by the goblin raiders. Once Gearad is freed, the party might choose to head for the nearby town or return to the Fitzgrey compound. If the goblins fail to attack the PCs while they are freeing Gearad, they follow the party's trail and attack the party en route to their destination. There are two goblins astride each worg, 14 total. They fire one arrow per round but suffer no penalties for mounted missile fire. Worgs without riders attack until they lose 10 hp or more, then flee. The goblins and worgs have no problem attacking the party's horses and mules. Due to their chanting, the goblins have a higher morale than normal; however, they retreat if seven or more of them are slain.

Goblins (14): INT average; AL LE; AC 6; MV 6; HD 1–1; hp 5 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (flight arrow or short sword); SZ S; ML 13; XP 35; *MM*/163; buckskin leather armor, short composite bow, short sword, 1d8 cp each.

Worgs (7): INT low; AL NE; AC 6; MV 18; HD 3+3; hp 18 each; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 2d4; SZ M; ML 11; XP 120; *MM*/362.

Concluding the Adventure

Upon the safe return of Gearad and Emory, the party discovers a secret. Gearad Fitzgrey was once the Royal Huntsman and Scout for the local king or lord. As a reward for the party's heroism, Gearad gives each PC a letter of introduction to his former regent. This could serve as a springboard for future adventures or help the PCs out of a particularly nasty situation in the future. In any event, the PCs will always be welcome at the Fitzgrey compound. Ω

Explorers find a golden locket inside an abandoned cave.

THE TROUBLE WITH IN-LAWS

BY WILLIAM KENOWER

Treachery is relative

Artwork by David Day
Cartography by Craig Zipse

Bill writes: "I would like to thank my father who had the forethought twenty years ago to buy me a little white box with three brown books in it, which has since allowed me to waste all that in life's worth wasting."

"The Trouble With In-Laws" is an AD&D® adventure for 3–8 characters of levels 1–3 (about 8 total levels). It is helpful if one of the higher-level characters is a fighter.

The adventure takes place in and around Pembrose, a medium-sized port city that thrives on trade and the rich natural resources surrounding it. One principal character in the adventure is Lord Donovan Grange, a prominent and politically powerful noble living in Pembrose.

For the DM

Not long ago, Warden Grange, the only child of Lord Grange, fell in love with and married Dolores Bankhead, the daughter of a moderately successful wine merchant in the city. Lord Grange forbade the marriage, but Warden went ahead with it anyway and lived with Dolores in a small home behind her father's wine shop.

Lord Grange was outraged. He had planned to marry his son to the daughter of another local noble, further consolidating his power. Three weeks before the start of the adventure, he commanded the captain of his guard, Rekken Filsner, to kidnap Dolores and intimidate her into leaving Warden.

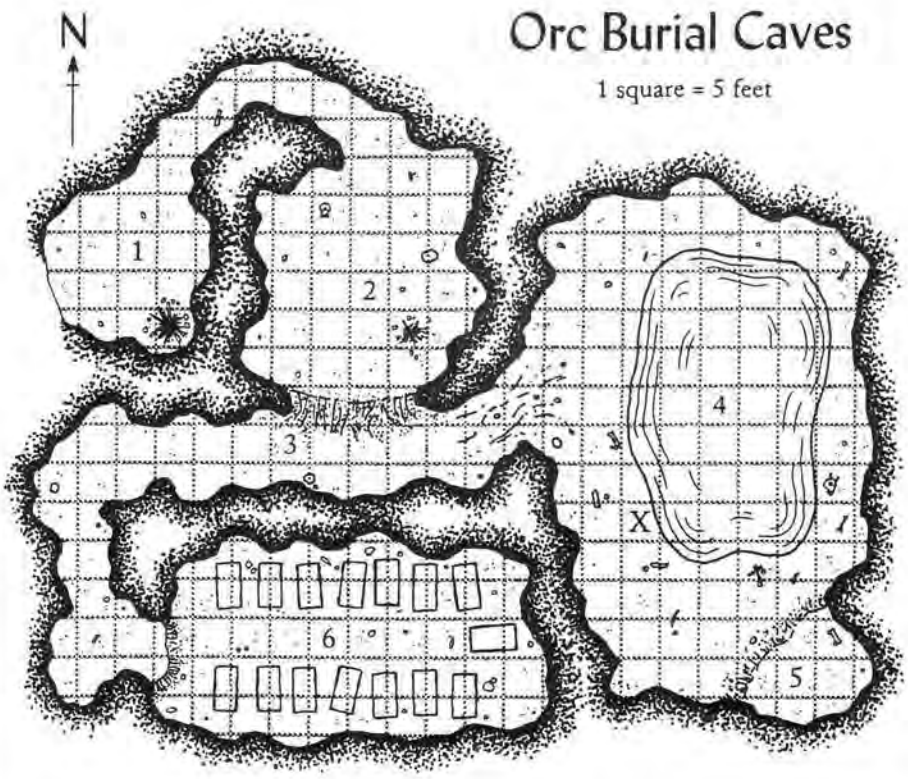
The kidnapping was successful, but Rekken—who was himself a scoundrel and who had grown to despise Lord Grange—had his own ideas. He quickly rounded up a crew of thugs, kidnapped Dolores, and took her to Fillmore Keep, a ruined stronghold about a day's journey from Pembrose. He then sent a blackmail note to Lord Grange, saying that if he wanted his part of this business kept secret he should send along 1,000 gp. Rekken sent another note to Warden, demanding 2,000 gp for the return of his bride. When Warden—who could muster only half the ransom—was not forthcoming with the gold, Rekken sent one of his accomplices, Widen Boll, to Pembrose with Dolores' wedding locket and a grisly note about the precarious state of the neck around which the gold locket

once hung. Things went awry when Widen, before delivering the necklace, stopped off at the Pot-Bellied Ale House and met two old friends named Freddie Pinritter and Denton Hought, who were off to explore some nearby caves that they believed contained an orcish burial chamber. The three never returned.

For the Players

What follows is one scenario by which the DM can begin the adventure. Since all that is required is for the PCs to explore a small cave complex outside of Pembrose, the DM may have the PCs come across a map in another adventure or hear a rumor about the orcish burial caves.

> You are on your way to the port city of Pembrose, lured by the promise of adventure or employment. Still several hours north of the city, you decide to stop for the evening and set up camp in a cozy hillside cave that seems an ideal shelter.
>
> Before setting about the business of bedding down for the night, you notice that the darkened corner in the northeast part of the cave is actually a narrow opening just wide enough for a man to pass through. It occurs to you that you might want to explore this passage before using the cave as a refuge.



The Caves

1. Entrance Cave. There are signs that this small cave (7' ceiling) has been used before as shelter: an old fire pit toward the southeast, small animal bones, broken armor bindings, and the like. There is also an abundance of cobwebs.

If the PCs decide to remain in the cave but do not to investigate the opening to the northeast, the huge spiders from areas **4** and **5** attack them in the middle of the night, springing at whatever unfortunate PC is on watch and imposing a –2 penalty to surprise.

2. Cavern With Drop-Off. The narrow tunnel opens into a larger cave that also appears to have been used as a campsite in the past. There are more chicken and rabbit bones strewn about, as well as an orc's skull. (The DM might require PCs to make a tracking proficiency roll to identify these bones.)

The southern wall drops away sharply—a 60-degree decline sloping 15 feet down to area **3**. The ramp is slick and relatively smooth, so those without the Climb Walls ability, mountaineering proficiency, or jumping proficiency need a secured rope to help them down.

3. Intersection Cave. The noises of anyone falling or tumbling into this cave from area **2** echo loudly and alert the huge spiders in area **5** that dinner is on the way. The passage leading east slopes down noticeably to area **4**, while the tunnel leading west remains fairly even.

4. Cavern With Pool. The floor of this large cavern slopes down gradually to a pool of water in the center. The ceiling arches into the darkness 15 feet to 20 feet above. The pool's water is quite drinkable, and the pool itself is 4' deep in the center.

As the PCs enter this cavern, their torch or lantern light (assuming they do not all possess infravision) reflects off the pool, revealing an absolute clutter of bones and animal hides on its shore.

Amid all this clutter, at the position marked "**X**" on the map, the PCs notice a gold glimmer. If they investigate, they find a gold locket lying among the refuse. (See "About the Locket" below.)

Unfortunately, the locket is also lying at a perfect leaping distance for the huge spiders in area **5**. As soon as a character reaches the "**X**", the spiders pounce. Characters suffer a –6 penalty to their surprise rolls when attacked in this fashion.

Searching the debris around the pool uncovers a dagger, a short sword, and a belt pouch containing 35 cp. Neither the dagger nor the short sword are extraordinary in any way.

5. Spider Ledge. A 4' high ledge stretches back to the east, forming a small chamber. Cobwebs obscure the ledge from a distance greater than

ten feet. The ledge serves as the spiders' nest and launching pad, the water below attracting ample prey.

Presently, the spiders' nest contains the bodies of their three most recent victims: Widen Boll, Freddy Pinritter, and Denton Hought. All three wear leather armor, and two of them carry short swords—still sheathed. (Denton dropped his short sword by the pool in area **4**.) The threesome were killed only yesterday and would have been the spiders' meal this evening.

Freddy is short and chubby, Denton is tall and thin, and Widen has a medium build but is bald and wears a leather patch over his left eye. Scattered about the nest are 120 sp, 38 gp, and a small topaz gem worth 75 gp.

Huge spiders (2): INT animal; AL N; AC 6; MV 18; HD 2+2; hp 14, 12; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6; SA poison (Type A; save at +1), leap; SZ M (6' diameter); ML 8; XP 270; *MM*/326.

6. Orcish Burial Chamber. This was Freddy, Denton and Widen's true destination, but they took an unfortunate wrong turn. The tunnel ends in a small ledge that drops 20 feet to the chamber below.

Years ago, an orc tribe buried their chieftain and his bodyguards here. The tribe was wiped out, but the tomb remains. Spaced evenly along the cave perimeter are 15 sarcophagi, their lids inscribed with crude orcish poetry.

It will quickly become clear to the PCs that they are not the first to have stumbled onto this sacred ground. Every lid has been pushed aside, and the sarcophagi contain nothing but dust and cobwebs.

About the Locket

When the PCs decide to examine the gold locket (found in area **4**), read the following:

> On closer examination, you see the locket is a beautifully-crafted gold heart suspended from a delicate gold chain, the clasp of which remains intact.

Then, should they decide to open the locket:

> Inside, there is an inscription: *For Dolores: My life; my love. Warden Grange.* You recognize the jewelry you are holding as a wedding locket. It is local custom among the upper class that the groom, on the wedding night, should give his new bride such a token of his undying love.
>
> As you close the locket, you realize that the name Grange sounds familiar, but you can't quite place where you've heard it ...

PCs with the local history proficiency can roll a proficiency check at +2 to determine whether or not they recognize the name Grange. Or, if you want to ensure the adventure moves along quickly, simply say that it comes to the PCs after a moment of reflection.

Things As They Are

Dolores has been missing for three weeks. Lord Grange is worried that word of his involvement will leak. He has already sent the blackmail money to Rekken, but he knows through his son that Dolores still has not returned. The stress is beginning to show around the Grange manor.

Warden is deranged with grief and, not having 2,000 gp himself, has gone to his father for the money. Still furious over his son's unsolicited marriage, Lord Grange refused to bow to the kidnappers' demands, instead saying he would use his influence with the governor to hunt down the kidnappers. (Lord Grange has made no such motion. He is concerned that if Dolores is returned, she will have learned of his involvement through her captors.)

Rekken and his band are growing impatient and wondering what has happened to Widen.

Off to Pembrose

Most likely, the next destination is Pembrose. It is a walled city, the gates to which are closed come nightfall. Otherwise, people come and go as they please. If you wish to hasten the adventure, you can state that the PCs are familiar with Pembrose already, having visited the city during their non-adventuring lives.

If the PCs are not interested in returning the locket to its rightful owner, there is no adventure. The locket could fetch 100 gp, but no pawn dealer in the city is willing to accept a wedding locket given by the son of Lord Grange, and they say as much. These pawn brokers are aware that Lord Grange's son was married earlier this year, but they do not know anything about Dolores' kidnapping or how her wedding locket ended up in the possession of strangers. Knowing this, PCs of good alignment should be discouraged from selling the locket.

Eventually, the PCs get around to the business of finding out exactly who Warden and Dolores Grange are and why the locket was in the caves. What follows is a list of the people whom the PCs might meet over the course of their investigation. Should the PCs seek help or information from a source not listed here, use your best judgment; remember, Pembrose is a good-sized city, and it is unlikely that anyone not listed below knows anything about Warden and Dolores Grange other than they are members of the city's lower aristocracy, thanks largely to the influence of Warden's father.

The PCs' search eventually takes them to the rougher sections of the city wherein they might have an encounter or two. (Refer to the "Encounters in Pembrose" sidebar.)

Who Knows What

Lord Grange. Donovan Grange lives in a well-protected manor in the wealthiest part of the city. The guard at the gate is unwilling to fetch the Lord until the PCs show him the necklace and locket.

If the PCs are belligerent or threatening, the gate guard signals two more guards atop the manor roof. These guards are armed with light crossbows and attack only if PCs try to force their way inside. All guards are 1st-level fighters wearing chain mail and carrying long swords.

Lord Grange is in his fifties. Although not a big man, he carries an air of authority and power. He is garbed in the finest clothes and wears a handsome maroon cape. If the PCs show him the locket and mention where they found it, read or paraphrase the following:

> Lord Grange shakes his head gravely. "As I feared. The poor girl. Dolores disappeared three weeks ago, The local authorities were notified immediately, but they were unable to find her. You say you found this north of the city? It seems the kidnappers were not planning to wait around for the ransom. I fear now we may have lost her. What a tragedy. Perhaps I am wrong—hopefully, I am. But ... well, this does not bode well."

If questioned, he informs the PCs that his son is living behind Bankhead Wine & Spirits. If pressed, Lord Grange provides brief directions. Lord Grange is not interested, however, in any kind of investigation and offers very little information beyond what is described above. If the PCs pester him, he will say, "I'm afraid I really cannot help you. If I were you, I would leave this matter to the authorities." If they persist in querying him, he directs them to the City Jail where Armen Foster, the head constable and loyal ally of the Lord, attempts to take the investigation out of the PCs' hands. (See Armen below.)

If the PCs ask Lord Grange about Rekken Filsner at any time, he grimaces and explains that his once-loyal Captain of the Guard was dismissed for belligerence. He is certain that Rekken no longer resides in Pembrose.

Lord Donovan Grange: AL LN; AC 10; MV 12; 0-level; hp 5; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; ML 11; XP 15; dagger.

Monty Delwart. Once second in command, now Captain of Lord Grange's small guard, Monty overheard enough to put together that Rekken and perhaps Lord Grange himself are somehow involved in Dolores' recent abduction.

While the PCs are talking to Lord Grange, they see Monty standing around, watching the proceedings with interest. When they are done with the Lord, he follows them at a discreet distance. He will not speak to them inside the walls of the manor, instead waiting until they are outside the manor where he addresses them in a hushed voice. At this point, read or paraphrase the following:

> "Something's funny, I tell you. I know m'Lord was none too pleased with Warden going and marrying Dolores. Not pleased at all. Then one night he's talking to Rekken Filsner—the Captain of the Manor Guard before me—and I hear m'Lord say something like "find her." Or something like that. Next thing I know, Rekken and Dolores are both gone. Then, m'Lord says Rekken was belligerent, demanding higher pay, and that I'm the new head of the guard. I don't understand it, but that's what I know. If anyone asks, you didn't hear it from me. I like my head where it is—right on top of my neck."

Monty says that Lord Grange has been very anxious of late, even more abrupt with the help than usual. If the PCs revisit Monty a day or more after having spoken with Lord Grange, he adds that Grange has been noticeably more agreeable since their first visit. (The return of Dolores' wedding locket has led Lord Grange to think that neither Dolores nor Rekken will trouble him any longer, and that Warden might be free once again to wed a lady of Lord Grange's choosing.)

If the PCs describe Widen Boll to Monty, he recalls seeing a bald man with an eye patch talking to Rekken just outside the manor several weeks ago. He adds that Widen looked like a ruffian and suggests that the PCs make some inquiries down in the low-rent district.

Monty Delwart: AL LG; AC 5; MV 9; F3; hp 20; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; ML 14; chain mail, long sword.

Warden Grange: Behind Bankhead Wine & Spirits is a modest dwelling. If the PCs knock on the door, a pale young man answers.

The man is Warden Grange. He is visibly distraught over the loss of his wife. If they show him the gold locket, he, like his father, assumes the worst. He pulls at his hair and cries, "Oh, why didn't I just give them what I had? Why did I let my father talk me out of that?"

Warden does not suspect his father of perpetrating her kidnapping. Despite their differences, Warden admires and respects his father and is appalled at the suggestion that Lord Grange might in some way be involved. Warden is not so sure about Rekken, on the other hand. Rekken might have met Dolores once or twice, and at least once Warden recalls the strange way Rekken looked at her (as if he knew something about Dolores that no one else knew).

Warden offers to give the PCs 750 gp (his entire savings) if they find his missing wife.

Warden Grange: AL LG; AC 10; MV 12; 0-level; hp 4; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; ML 10; unarmed.

Jezzel Bankhead: Dolores' father can be found in the store and is equally despondent over Dolores' disappearance. Unlike Warden, he has no respect for Lord Grange. He is furious that Lord Grange convinced Warden not to pay the ransom immediately. Jezzel offered to donate 250 gp (his savings) toward Dolores' ransom, but knowing this won't suffice, he's at his wit's end. He gives the 250 gp to PCs if they find his daughter and return her alive, but for the sake of his business, he's counting on a bit more charity.

Jezzel Bankhead: AL LG; AC 10; MV 12; 0-level; hp 4; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; ML 9; unarmed.

Armen Foster: Armen is the Head Constable in Pembrose and operates out of his office at the City Jail. Armen is a rough-looking character, his face having never fully recovered from the brawls of his youth. If the PCs ask him about Rekken, he says Rekken is wanted for robbery. Armen declines to elaborate. (In fact, Rekken has not committed any crime other than the kidnapping of Dolores and the blackmail of Lord Grange. It is for the latter crime that Armen wants Rekken's head.)

If the PCs describe Widen Boll to Armen, he says Widen is a notorious thug who spends too much time at the Pot-Bellied Ale House.

If, on the other hand, the PCs show him the locket or let it be known they are investigating Dolores' disappearance, he takes the locket, thanks them, and shows them the door. He never speaks to the PCs

Encounters in Pembrose (Roll 1d4)

1. Thugs. If it is evening, "The Handsome Blades" (as they call themselves) will step out of an alley, surround the PCs, and demand their money. They have no interest in fighting to the death and flee as soon as they are outnumbered two-to-one.

Thugs (6): AL LE; AC 8; MV 12; T2; hp 8 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; SA backstab (×2); SD move silently (15%), hide in shadows (15%); ML 11; XP 65; leather armor, short sword, 2d4 sp each.

2. Constable. Fatty Duggan (as rotund as his name suggests) stops the PCs to question them. He considers adventuring a dishonorable profession and harasses the PCs, saying, "How have ya paid a fair tax on all the booty you've been pilfering from the King's forests and caves? Or are ya just pocketing it without any thanks to the King for providing you with constables like myself and high walls around the cities to keep you safe at night?"

Fatty is looking for 5–10 gp per PC. If they flatly refuse to pay, he backs off with a stern warning about the perils of the life they have chosen.

Fatty Duggan: AL NE; AC 5; MV 9; F3; hp 16; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; ML 12; XP 65; chain mail, footman's mace, 2d6 gp.

3. The Sting. As the PCs pass a dark alley, they hear a "Psst!" Turning, they see a man wearing a dark cloak. This is Jasper Parneky, a small-time thief and mugger. Jasper tries to lure the PCs into the alley to sell them what he claims is a magical dagger. Meanwhile, his two companions, the half-ogres Thon and Otto, are lurking in a doorway and spring out as soon as the PCs are in the shadows.

If the PCs ask why the sale must be made in a dark alley, Jasper impatiently explains that sales of such items are illegal in Pembrose (a lie). Needless to say, the dagger is not magical.

Jasper Parneky: AL LE; AC 7; MV 12; T3; hp 12; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; SA backstab (×2); SD hide in shadows (25%), move silently (25%); ML 11; XP 120; leather armor, short sword, dagger, belt pouch with 75 sp and 52 gp.

Thon and **Otto** (half-ogres): INT low (7); AL LE; AC 5; MV 12; HD 2+6; hp 17, 15; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type +2; ML 12; SZ L; XP 270; *MM*/274; club.

4. Shady Peddler. Fitzer Rice, a slimy little fellow, has a strongbox of goods he carries under his arm. He claims to possess many magical items. The strongbox holds three daggers, a short sword, a bracelet, an amulet, a necklace, herbs, a tiara, and many earrings. Fitzer tries to get between 10–25 gp for any item. Everything is basically worthless—the weapons are dull, the jewelry fake—except the herbs which, unknown to Fitzer, are actually quite rare and, if mixed properly with other ingredients, produce a mild healing potion (treat as *potion of healing*). Knowing no better, Fitzer claims that the herbs grant terrific strength to whoever consumes them, and he's charging 15 gp for the bunch.

A PC with the herbalism proficiency is entitled to a proficiency check to recognize the herbs; if the first roll is successful, another proficiency check should be made to see whether the PC knows how to prepare the healing potion properly.

Fitzer is an acquaintance of Widen Boll's. He knows that Widen left the city with two other men, passing through the north gate, but has seen neither Widen nor his friends since. He does not recall the names of the other two individuals.

Fitzer Rice: AL CN; AC 10; MV 12; 0-level; hp 3; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; ML 6; XP 15; dagger.

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Encounters on the Way to Twain (Roll 1d4)

1. Hobgoblin Ambush. A band of eight hobgoblins are waiting in the trees in ambush unsuspecting travelers. Half of them are armed with short bows and fire as many volleys as possible before the entire group closes on the PCs. The hobgoblins retreat when half their numbers are slain.

Hobgoblins (8): INT average; AL LE; AC 5; MV 9; HD 1+1; hp 6 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; SZ M; ML 11; XP 35; *MM*/191; scimitar, short bow, four arrows each.

2. Rain. A miserable pouring rain begins that slows movement by a third and cuts visibility in half. If possible, the rain should begin shortly after the PCs leave Pembrose; this can be coupled with other encounters.

3. Loggers. Four loggers are on their way to Pembrose. They are riding three horse-drawn carts stacked with cut wood to be sold in the city. The men are friendly and wave amiably to the PCs as they pass.

If the PCs want to ask questions, the loggers stop a moment and, if it's lunch time, share a meal. They have never heard of Dolores Grange, Widen Boll, or Rekken Filsner, though they are familiar with Lord Grange by name only. If asked about Fillmore Keep, they say it's a "beat-up old stronghold that's been empty as long as anyone can remember." If pressed, one of the loggers reports a woodsman's claim that men have been seen wandering around the keep as recently as a week ago.

4. Wild Boars. This pair of hungry boars comes charging through the forest toward the PCs. The boars continue to fight until reduced to –7 hp.

Wild boars (2): INT animal; AL N; AC 7; MV 15; HD 3+3; hp 16, 13; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 3d4; ML 9; SZ M; XP 175; *MM*/241.

after this. He offers no information. Armen is in league with Lord Grange and has no intention of letting the Lord's name be dragged into the affair.

Should the PCs threaten or attack Armen, they will certainly have their hands full. Armen is specialized with the short sword and has two guards stationed outside his office at all times. They can join combat in one round; ten more guards arrive the round after that from the adjacent barracks.

Even if the PCs are lucky enough to defeat Armen and his men, they must leave the jail covered in blood. At this point, finding Dolores will probably take a back seat to avoiding arrest and execution.

Armen Foster: AL NE; AC 3; MV 9; F4; hp 30; THAC0 17 (15 with short sword); #AT 3/2; Dmg by weapon type; S 17 (+1/+1), D 16, C 15, I 13, W 9, Ch 9; ML 13; XP 270; chain mail, short sword (specialized; +1 to hit, +2 dmg).

City guards (12): AL N; AC 5; MV 9; F2; hp 12 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; ML 12; XP 35; chain mail, halberd, short sword.

Any Constable, Scoundrel or Low-Rent District Inhabitant: To gain information about Widen Boll, the PCs must work their way down to the southern part of Pembrose, where criminals, thugs, and adventurers spend most of their time. Here, any of the aforementioned NPCs has a 40% chance of having seen Widen, his bald pate and eyepatch making him very recognizable. For a small bribe (10 gp), the PCs can learn that Widen was a frequent patron at the Pot-Bellied Ale House. Those who know Widen inform PCs that he was always in trouble with the law and up to no good.

If the PCs look for Widen at the Pot-Bellied Ale House, they encounter Raskin, Fenky, and Harold (detailed below).

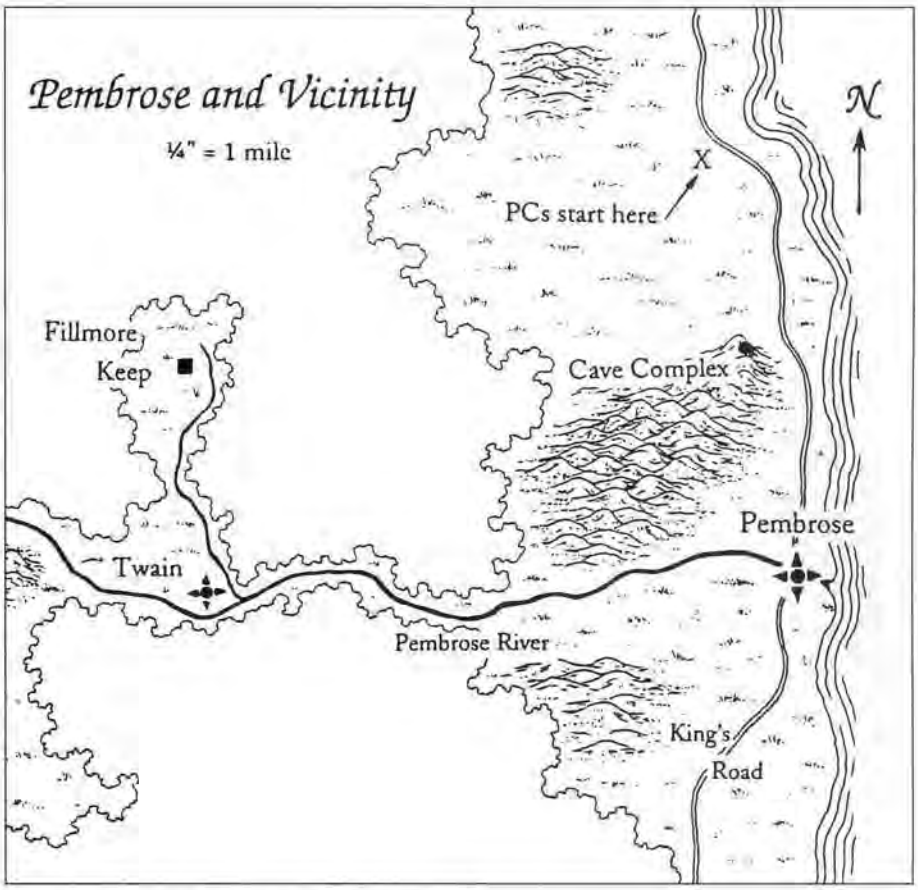
Raskin Freed: Raskin is a regular at the Pot-Bellied Ale House. He saw Widen earlier with Freddy and Denton (whom Raskin knows). Raskin overheard the mangy threesome taking about an orcish burial ground located somewhere north of the city.

Raskin Freed: AL NG; AC 10; MV 12; 0-level; hp 4; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; ML 7; dagger,

Harold Hargrave, Bartender at the Pot-Bellied Ale House: Harold witnessed the conversation between Widen and Rekken. If asked, he tells the PCs that Rekken was an unusual presence at the Ale House. He also heard Widen asking Fenton Bottom, a popular bard at the Ale House, if he had ever visited Fillmore Keep in his travels. If the PCs express any desire to speak with the bard, Harold knows that Fenton receives regular business at Grezzel's Ale House and the Lonesome Soldier Inn.

Harold Hargrave: AL NG; AC 10; MV 12; F1; hp 7; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; ML 12; club.

Fenton Bottom: Fenton is a well-known and well-liked personality in the ale houses and inns of Pembrose. The PCs can find him at the Lonesome Soldier Inn, telling stories and singing songs to a group of 1d6+4 off-duty city guards. PCs wanted by Armen Foster (or accused of attacking the constable) are recognized by the city guards who are present unless the PCs take great pains to disguise their identities. Their other option is to remain outside the Inn until Fenton leaves and speak to him then.



Fenton is always forthcoming with information. Should the PCs ask him about Fillmore Keep and Widen in general, read or paraphrase the following:

> "Sure I knew Widen, the louse. Went with him once looking for a cache of rubies misplaced by some bugbears, and I think the fool picked my pocket. No matter. He was curious about Fillmore Keep, so I told him it was a ruined stronghold north of Twain, its dungeon intact but probably plundered ages ago. Don't know why he was curious, he would not say. Very secretive. Well, that was a couple of weeks ago. I don't trust him for a moment—neither him nor his so-called friends."

If asked, Fenton tells the PCs that Fillmore Keep is located just a few miles north of the village of Twain, which can be reached by following the Pembrose River west for a day or so. He does not know Rekken, Lord Grange, or Warden. He does know Armen, the Head Constable, and dislikes him profoundly. He cannot be enticed to accompany the PCs, as he has recently returned from another adventure and has not finished spending all the gold thereby acquired, as is his policy. He's also made commitments to perform at several of the local establishments.

Fenton Bottom: AL NG; AC 8; MV 12; B3; hp 18; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; SD rogue abilities; S 12, D 16, C 12, I 13, W 12, Ch 16; ML 12; short sword, lute, pouch with 95 gp.

Spells memorized: *color spray, ventriloquism.*

On the Way to Twain

Following the Pembrose River, the village of Twain lies one day's walk or half a day's ride west of the city. The river is gently-flowing, about twenty yards wide (on average), and between 5' and 15' deep. The countryside between Pembrose and Twain is primarily hills (north of the river) and farmland (south of the river) until about 10 miles outside Twain where the river flows through a light forest. There is a 1 in 6 chance per hour of a random encounter occurring along the river. (See the "Encounters on the Way to Twain" sidebar on page 44.)

Regardless of whether the PCs have an encounter, read the following when they are about a mile outside of Twain:

> As you rest a moment, you hear something crashing through the forest from the north. A moment later, a rough-looking man in studded leather armor appears, sweating and panting. He carries a sword in one hand, a shield in the other. He sees you, stops, thinks a moment, than hurries in your direction.

The man is Basil Stump. He is dressed in studded leather armor and carries a broad sword and small shield. If asked why he is hurrying, he claims that he's being chased by some orcs. When no orcs appear behind him, he will explain he must have lost them. He is skittish and eager to be on his way.

Basil is actually a defecting member of Rekken's gang. Basil, who had a weak stomach for kidnapping to begin with, suggested to Rekken that they take the 1,000 gp from Lord Grange, release Dolores, and be done with it. Rekken considered this tantamount to insubordination and before the entire band of men gave him three lashes with a whip and a stern lecture about solidarity. Basil snuck out the following night. Fearful that Rekken will find and kill him, Basil wants to leave the area and get far away from Pembrose.

Basil does not plan to stand long and chat. However, his dislike for Rekken is severe enough at this point that if questioned specifically about Dolores, Rekken, or Lord Grange, he reveals what he knows:

- Dolores is being held in one of the few functional cells in the dungeon of the keep.
- The keep is enclosed by a stone wall that has collapsed in several places. Rekken has guards patrolling the courtyard at all times. Guards armed with crossbows typically watch the vicinity around the keep from the keep's many towers.
- There are about a dozen men guarding the keep.
- Rekken is a fierce, crafty fighter and not to be taken lightly.

Basil refuses to accompany the PCs to Twain or the keep. Nothing they say can convince him to join the party; however, a *charm person* spell makes him more receptive to the caster's wishes, but he receives a second saving throw if instructed to return to the keep. As soon as the PCs are finished with him, he heads west along the river.

Basil Stump: AL N; AC 6; MV 9; F1; hp 6; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; ML 9; studded leather armor, shield, broad sword.

Fillmore Keep

There is a brook that runs north from the Pembrose River out of Twain. If followed for three miles through the forest, it eventually flows through a large clearly. Fillmore Keep sits on top of a small rise in the middle of the clearing. It's about 200 yards from the edge of the forest to the keep. There are enough bushes, trees and high grass between the keep and the forest for the PCs, if they proceed with care, to approach the keep unseen.

Here is where the PCs have their strategic abilities tested. Rekken has devised a number of defensive precautions.

If the PCs are spotted outside the walls of the keep, and it is determined that they are hostile or curious, Rekken positions one guard with a crossbow in each of the four corner towers. Three more with crossbows are placed on the parapet walls with instructions to go where the fighting is heaviest. If the PCs are employing guerrilla tactics instead of rushing the keep outright, Rekken dispatches Rothgy and three guards to circle around and ambush the PCs. Rothgy is no fool, and if an ambush seems impractical—if the PCs are hunkered down and keeping close watch—he returns to the keep. Rekken and the remaining guards patrol the courtyard, keeping an eye on the many gaps in the walls.

If the PCs penetrate the outer wall, Rekken and his men retreat to the keep itself. They push the cart from area **5** to block the entrance between areas **3** and **4**. Three guards with crossbows are positioned here. Two more guards with crossbows go to area **6** to watch that opening. The remaining guards patrol the main floor with Rekken and Rothgy. If Rekken believes he knows the positions of all the PCs, he sends Rothgy with a few men to attempt an ambush.

The PCs may decide, depending on how much or how little they know about the men in the keep, to talk with Rekken and/or his men. The kidnappers claim that they have discovered a secret entrance that spirals down into the Underdark. They tell the PCs that they have been sent by the King to secure and close this entrance, for the greater good of the realm. If the PCs ask to see proof of this, Rothgy will be summoned. Rothgy produces a forged letter from the king instructing them of their mission. If the PCs study the letter closely, they might notice several inconsistencies. Any PC with the etiquette NWP, with a successful skill check, notices that the greeting employed in the letter is only used when one head-of-state addresses another head-of-state. Secondly, any PC with the heraldry NWP notices, again with a skill roll, that the King's seal was applied upside down, which is done only when the King wishes to insult the person with whom he is corresponding.

In any case, if the PCs become overly curious or belligerent with Rekken or his men, or they begin asking questions about Dolores or Warden, conversation ends and combat begins. At this point, however, all surprise has been lost, and the PCs must face Rekken's fully assembled gang.

The morale of Rekken's men is fair. While Basil was not particularly popular in the gang (he was a complainer), his whipping left the men

more afraid of than loyal to Rekken. What's more, the wait for the ransom money has gone far longer than Rekken had promised, and boredom and doubt have set in. Therefore, if any member of Rekken's gang is cut off from Rekken or Rothgy and is outnumbered, that guard's morale drops from 11 to 8, and morale checks must be made each round.

The keep is a two-story stone building surrounded by a 25' high wall with 30' high towers. It is an old, weather-beaten structure with large holes and crumbling masonry. (Climbing checks receive a +10% bonus to the roll.)

As the PCs near the keep, they see smoke rising from the northern and western chimneys.

Ground Floor

1a-h. Guard Towers. Like most other chambers in the keep, the doors to the towers were removed or destroyed long ago. Stone stairs spiral up against the interior wall. The tops of the towers, as well as the tops of the walls surrounding the keep, are crenelated. From the towers, there is a short flight of stone steps down to the parapet wall.

Tower **1d** has a trap door in its base. A flagstone can be removed revealing hand-holds carved into the wall leading to a tunnel 15' below. The tunnel leads to area **20** and serves as Rothgy's last escape.

2. Courtyard. The courtyard is overgrown with wildflowers and high grass. In the northwest corner is a stone well from which water can still be drawn. A rope and bucket are tied to the well. Four horses, tied to posts near the well, munch happily on the tall grass.

Two guards patrol the grounds and walls of the keep. They pace around the courtyard lazily, occasionally winding their way up to the towers and parapet. The guards are indicated with a "**G**" on the map, but these needn't be their exact locations.

When the PCs approach the keep, roll 1d10 to determine where the guards are located: 1–3, in the courtyard; 4–5, talking by the well; 6–7, one patrolling the ground, the other on a tower (DM's choice); 8–9, both on a tower; 10, one on a tower, the other asleep against a wall of the keep.

If the guards hear a noise or see something suspicious, they investigate on their own first. If there is trouble, however, or if they see anyone, they immediately give a call that alerts the keep's other occupants.

Guards (2): AL NE; AC 6; MV 9; F1; hp 6 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; ML 11; XP 35; studded leather armor, shield, broad sword, light crossbow, six bolts.

3–4. Empty Chambers. These once served as audience chambers. It is not possible to tell when the last time the fireplaces were used. In the fireplace of area **3** are some recently-discarded chicken bones. (A guard had taken his lunch there.) Otherwise, the rooms are bare. As with all rooms of the keep, blankets and cloth have been hung over the windows.

5. Great Hall. Five guards are resting in front of a warm fire. There is a cart in the northeast corner that was used to bring provisions to the keep. There is also a pile of debris to the northwest—empty crates and boxes, bones, and rags. Eight bedrolls are laid out in the southwest.

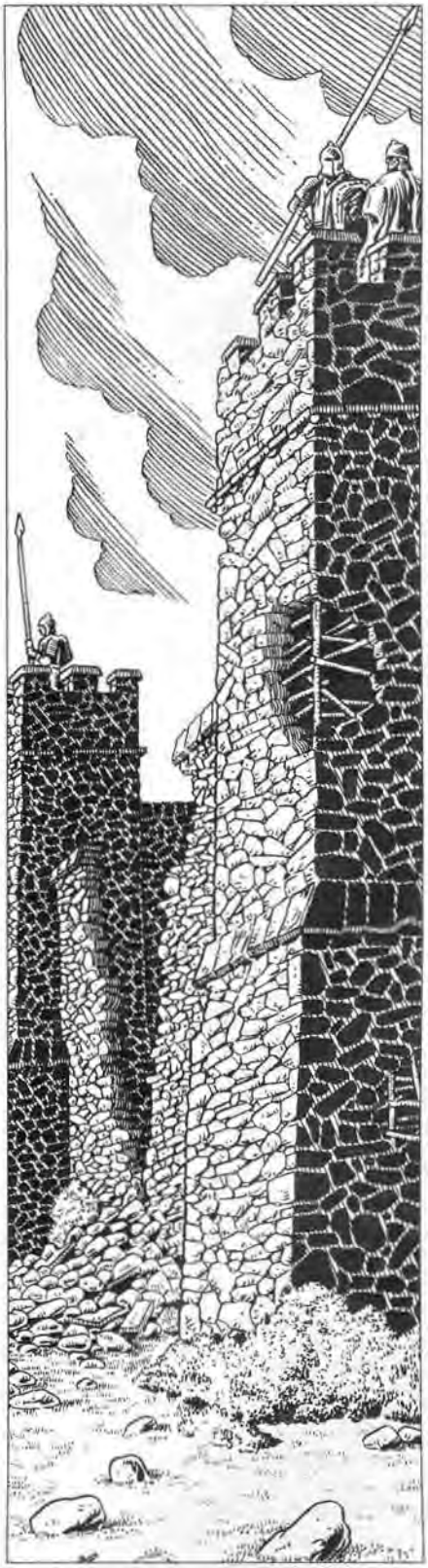
If the PCs make it to the great hall undetected, these guards call for help immediately. Once the alarm is sounded, the guard in area **7** arrive in one round; then, the following round, the two outside guards arrive (assuming they are still alive and mobile), as well as Rekken and the guards from upstairs and Rothgy and the guards from downstairs.

Guards (5): hp 6 each; see area **2** for complete statistics.

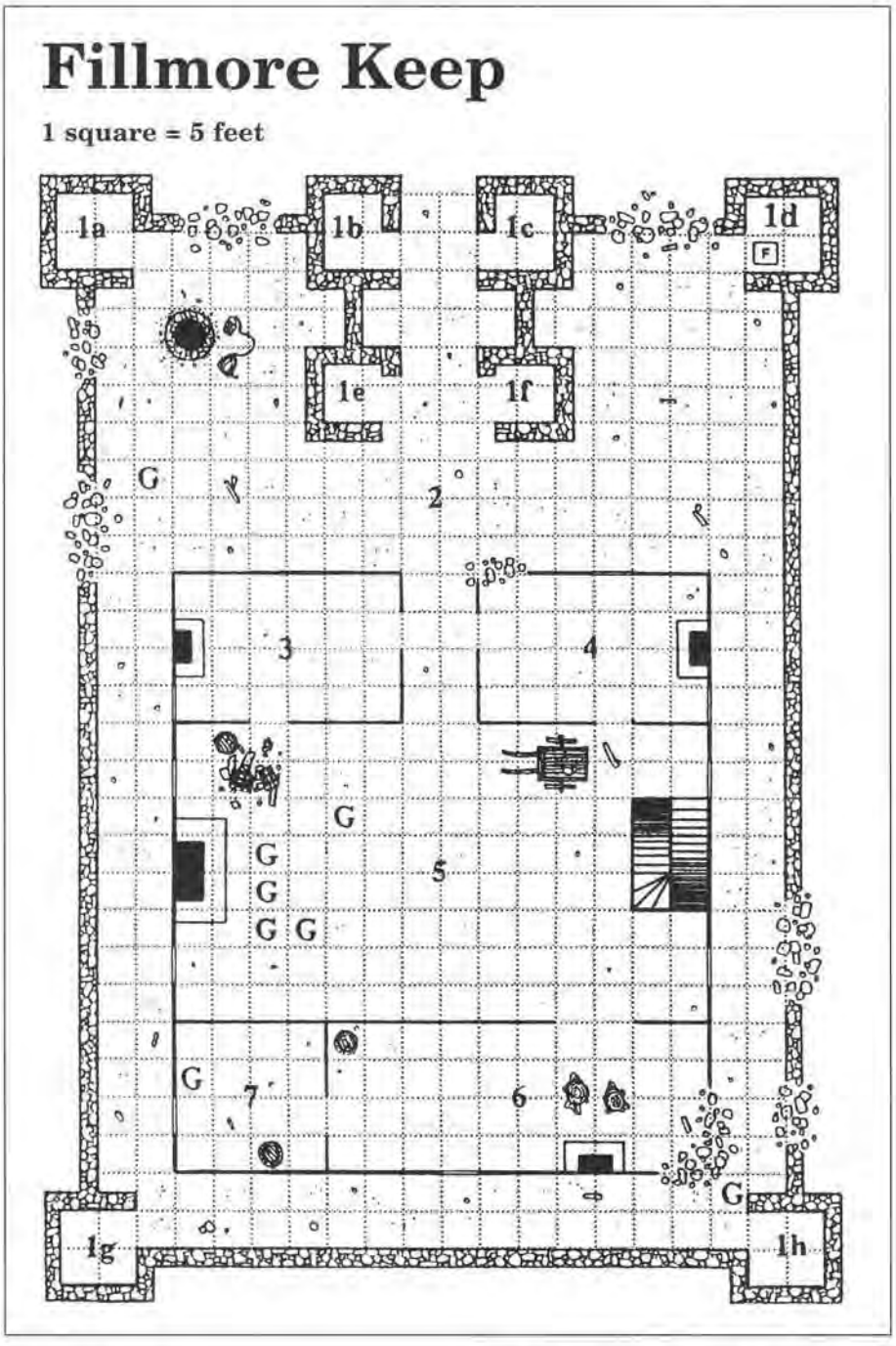
6. Old Kitchen. A barrel of ale stands near the northwest corner. There are also two blood-stained tree stumps sitting in the middle of the kitchen with a cleaver laid across one and a skinning knife across the other. A large pot has been suspended across the fireplace and shows signs of recent use.

7. Storage Room. One guard is lounging here. Stored here are most of the gang's provisions. In total, there is a deer carcass (bagged that morning), a barrel of flour, a large wedge of cheese, and a keg of ale.

Guard: hp 6; see area **2** for complete statistics.



Guards stand watch over the ruins of Fillmore Keep.



Upper Level

8. Upstairs Hall. Four guards are milling around this chamber. They have a fire burning in the hearth, and their bedrolls are arrayed in the eastern part of the chamber. Debris (wood and stone) is piled in the southwest corner.

Rekken and his men boarded up the opening in the south to keep out the draft. There are eight boards in all, each requiring a successful Strength check to remove.

Guards (4): hp 6 each; see area **2** for complete statistics.

9–10. Abandoned Areas. These areas have never been used by Rekken or his gang. There are cobwebs and dirt, but little else.

11. Rothgy's Chamber. A heavy curtain hangs across the entrance to this chamber. This room belongs to Rothgy Frizzo, who is currently guarding Dolores in the dungeon. As Rekken's second-in-command, Rothgy has a cot to sleep on instead of just a bedroll. In the northeast corner is a small chest holding Rothgy's belongings: an extra set of boots, a cape, some gloves, a spare set of thieves' tools, and a bottle of red wine.

At the bottom of Rothgy's chest rests a smaller wooden coffer. It is locked (Rothgy has the key) and trapped with a *glyph of warding* that Rothgy paid an evil priest to cast before the gang embarked for the keep. Anyone opening the coffer without the proper key triggers the glyph and sustains a 5d4 hp electrical shock. Inside the coffer is Rothgy's treasure: 200 sp, 150 gp, and a brooch encrusted with emerald chips worth 250 gp.

12. Rekken's Chamber. Like Rothgy, Rekken has a heavy curtain across the entrance to his chamber. He also sleeps on a cot and has an oak chest against the south wall. The room is otherwise bare.

It is unlikely the PCs will reach this room without Rekken having been alerted, but if they do, and if they are numerous enough (more than three), Rekken tries to talk his way out of a fight. He explains that it was all Lord Grange's idea, that he was only following orders, and that he feared disobeying his Lord. He tells the PCs they are free to take Dolores provided they let him go free, to "escape Lord Grange's reach." (This is true to a certain extent; Rekken knows how much influence Lord Grange has with the city's Head Constable.) If the PCs don't buy this and seem determined to bring Rekken to justice, he tries to bribe them with the 1,000 gp Lord Grange has already sent; if that doesn't work, he fights for freedom.

Rekken also possesses a *figurine of wondrous power.* The figurine appears as a small jade lizard and becomes a live giant lizard upon command. Unlike most figurines, if the giant lizard is killed in combat, it does not revert to a figurine but remains a dead lizard. The command word, "Gilfoosin," is written on the

lizard figurine's belly. Rekken prefers to save the figurine for when he is alone or for when things look their bleakest.

If the PCs are spotted in the courtyard, Rekken picks up his long bow and, if he has a clear shot, does as much damage as possible from his window. Otherwise, he joins the fight and instructs his men as described above. He keeps a potion of *healing* with three doses and does not share its contents with anyone.

Rekken's oak chest is heavy (120 lbs.) and locked. It contains two pairs of trousers, three shirts, a short sword and scabbard, a book entitled *The Perfect General* (a treatise on combat tactics), ten candles, a set of rations for one week, and a sack containing 1,000 gp (the blackmail money from Lord Grange). The chest also has a false bottom containing a pouch with 25 pp.

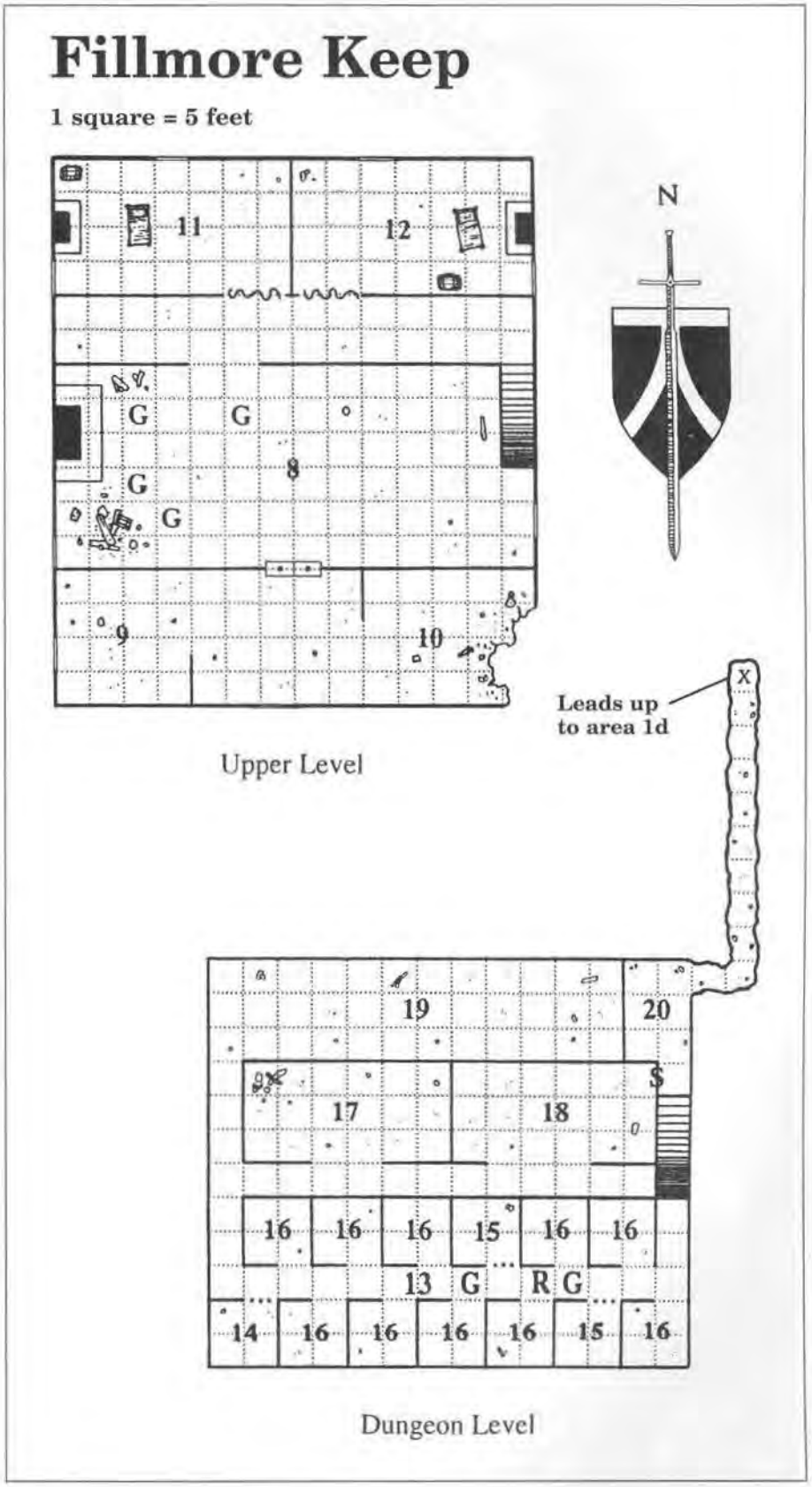
Rekken Filsner: AL LE; AC 2; MV 9; F4; hp 32; THAC0 17 (15 with *broad sword +1*); #AT 1 (3/2 with broad sword); Dmg by weapon type +1 (Strength), +2 (specialization); S 16 (+0/+1), D 15, C 16, I 14, W 10, Ch 13; ML 13; XP 420; chain mail, *shield +1, broad sword +1* (specialized), long bow, 12 sheaf arrows, dagger, potion of *healing, figurine of wondrous power* (lizard), key (to oak chest).

Giant lizard: INT animal; AL N; AC 5; MV 9; HD 3+1; hp 17; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8; SA swallow whole on roll of natural 20; SZ H (15' long); ML 10; XP 175; *MM*/226.

Dungeon Level

13. Dungeon. Rothgy Frizzo and two guards keep watch over Dolores. This would normally be Rothgy's job alone, but the guards have joined him for company. If there is trouble upstairs, all three run to investigate, though Rothgy has the guards lead the way. Should the PCs arrive in the dungeon unannounced, Rothgy hurls daggers then has the guards engage the PCs in melee. If Rothgy feels the guards have sufficiently weakened the PCs, he attacks anyone still standing. Otherwise, he quaffs his potion of *invisibility*, heads to the secret passage in area **20**, and makes his escape. At the present time, only

continued on page 55



SIDETREKS

BY JOHN W. BAICHTAL

Artwork by Karl Waller

"Al-Kandîl" (The Lamp) is an AD&D® AL-QADIM® SideTrek for one or more PCs of levels 5–10. Familiarity with the AL-QADIM *Arabian Adventures* sourcebook is helpful but not necessary. If the DM lacks this resource, he or she may change Zakharan spells to more conventional ones without difficulty.

Adventure Setup

The PC or party acquires an aged brass lamp from which a powerful magical aura radiates. The lamp has not been used in years and is found in an old, rotten chest in a deep cellar somewhere. Eventually, one of the PCs will try rubbing the lamp, perhaps simply to polish it up for resale but more likely because has has heard legends of genies' lamps. If the lamp is rubbed, read the following aloud to the players:

> A spark jumps from the lamp, then another, then a whole torrent as purple and orange smoke issues forth. The smoke hovers in a shimmering cloud, then coalesces into a humanoid figure seated cross-legged. He is dressed outlandishly with orange pantaloons and embroidered purple slippers. A gold and crimson vest exposes bronzed, muscular arms and shoulders. He is wearing a purple turban secured with a huge, jeweled brooch with an ostrich plume. A gilt dagger is thrust through a tangerine sash. However, the most interesting aspect of the figure is his eyes, dark and full of wisdom. He looks like he might be thirty years old, and his waxed goatee and moustache are untouched by gray. As the mist vanishes, the man stands and bows.
>
> "Salaam, O master. I am Yâcût, your servant. Whatever you command, I shall do it, if it is within my powers."

AL-KANDIL

The PCs' first (and most logical) deduction is likely to be that this guy is a genie. However, they are wrong. The lamp is a magical trap that imprisons a person and forces him to act like a genie, and he may be freed only if the possessor of the lamp can be tricked into saying a special magical phrase. If that is done, then the "genie" is freed and the old possessor takes his place!

The Prisoner of the Lamp

Yâcût bin Zam is a Zakharan fire elementalist (flame mage) who once belonged to the nefarious Brotherhood of the True Flame, the most evil wizard's guild in that land. He rose quite high in the organization and eventually made it into the Conclave of Beys (the ruling council) through many heroic deeds and a certain amount of judicious backstabbing. About 40 years ago, a crafty assistant named Farid ibn Mahmud betrayed him. He arranged for a certain lamp to come into Yâcût's possession, with a compliant genie inside. It took about a year for the genie to convince his "master" to utter the magical phrase of freedom, and when that happened, Yâcût bin Zam vanished from the face of Zakhara. The genie, on orders from Farid, threw the lamp into the ocean.

Fifteen years later, aquatic elves discovered the lamp and sold it to a kindly wizard who was too smart to be tricked into saying the phrase. However, he did not enjoy the prospect of forcing labor out of a captive, so he gave the lamp to a nearby church that subsequently fell to orcs. So it went over the interceding quarter century. Those owners smart enough to appreciate Yâcût's powers were too cunning to take his place. About three years ago, thieves stole the lamp and stashed it in a hideyhole, but they were caught and hanged before they could recover it. There the lamp remained until the adventurers arrived on the scene.

Having tried other tactics in the past, Yâcût goes this route: he tries to be as helpful as possible. His plan is to make the party totally dependent on the service he provides, then raise the stakes. When they really need help, he demands to be freed. He might say (for instance) that to help the party, he needs to access one of his scrolls, perhaps to cast a *limited wish*. He will tell them the special phrase, but naturally fails to mention that the PC freeing him will become a prisoner of the lamp. When Yâcût has found his freedom, he will "repay" the PCs accordingly.

Powers

At this point, the characters will undoubtedly be overjoyed at finding the "genie." Almost certainly they will play around with his powers, perhaps hoping to eke a *wish* or three out of him. The following is a comprehensive list of his magical abilities:

❖ *Create food and water* for up to 24 people, once per day.

❖ *Levitate,* on himself, once/day.

❖ *Fools' gold,* affecting up to 777 copper coins, once per day.

❖ *Wall of fog,* three times per day.

❖ *Control weather,* once per week.

❖ Cast those spells he had memorized when he was imprisoned (listed below). These require no components and are usable once per day.

❖ Use any magical items that always operate and do not require activation to function (a *ring of protection* would be a good example). However, wands are useless, as are scrolls, potions and similar items. The "genie" may not be separated from any of his items.

❖ He may fight if commanded and if slain reverts to *gaseous form* and may not be summoned for another week.

❖ The "genie" is protected from all mind-affecting magic and psionics.

A prisoner of the lamp always appears dressed in fancy Zakharan clothes, no matter what his original attire. This is merely an illusion. He never ages, nor does he require sustenance of any kind. However, he may remain outside the lamp for only one hour at a time, four times per day.

Limitations

While he seems very powerful, the "genie" cannot:

❖ Change memorized spells.

❖ Take anything into his prison, whether it is a person or a grain of sand. Only those items on his person when he was imprisoned go with him, and these cannot be separated from him.

❖ Speak discourteously to the person who summons him.

❖ Attack or lie to his master, nor may he refuse to answer a question or disobey a command. "Master" is defined as whoever summoned him last. Note that there are many ways to twist speech to bypass these rules.

❖ Enter or leave the lamp without his master's permission, nor may he travel further than 333 feet from the lamp. If this occurs, Yâcût is immediately recalled to the lamp and must be resummoned.

If a *dispel magic* is cast on the "genie," he is forced back into the lamp and cannot be resummoned for 24 hours. If the lamp is taken into a dead magic zone or touched by an *anti-magic shell,* the "genie" can not be summoned.

The only way the "genie" can be freed is if his master touches the

MAP SYMBOLS

These symbols are used on most maps in DUNGEON® Adventures.

DOOR

DOUBLE DOOR

SECRET DOOR

LOCKED DOOR

WIZARD-LOCKED DOOR

CONCEALED DOOR

BARRED DOOR

PORTCULLIS OR BARS

WINDOW

ARROW SLIT

FIREPLACE

COVERED PIT

OPEN PIT

FOUNTAIN

SPIRAL STAIRS

STATUE

STAIRS

TRAP DOOR IN CEILING

TRAP DOOR IN FLOOR

SECRET TRAP DOOR

lamp and utters the following Midani phrase: "hurriyi haida bakhshish'lak yâh," which means simply "I free you." Of course, the master then becomes imprisoned. An alternative is for another person (not the person trapped in the lamp) to cast a *wish*.

Yâcût

The lamp's current prisoner has undergone a considerable alteration in mentality during his incarceration. Certainly, he has learned patience and humility. He has matured a great deal from the ruthless, impulsive killer of his youth.

This does not mean he has come to accept his imprisonment. In fact, he will do anything in his power to free himself—betray anyone, commit any crime. Once out, he won't bear the PCs any malice unless they abused him. Farid ibn Mahmud is another story altogether. Yâcût has sworn a fearful oath to destroy Farid and his family. No memory of them will survive: the people will be slain and the bodies hid, the family property will be put to the torch, tombs defiled, records burnt. It will be as if Farid and his clan had never existed. Such is the fury of a flame mage betrayed.

Yâcût bin Zam: AL CN; AC 6; MV 12; W14 (fire elementalist); hp 36; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; SA varies; SD varies; S 14, D 9, C 9, I 17, W 13, Ch 14; ML 15; SZ M (5'5"); XP 10,000; Spells: *magic missile, taunt, affect normal fires, hypnotism, phantasmal force; fire arrows*, flaming sphere, forget, web, knock; infravision, invisibility 10' radius, protection from normal missiles, slow, dispel magic; fire shield, wall of fire, minor creation, sunfire*; conjure fire elemental, telekinesis, teleport, advanced illusion; legend lore, true seeing; delayed blast fireball.* Magical items: *ring of elusiveness* (combines the functions of *protection +4* and *blinking*), *circlet of mental power* (combines the effects of a *helm of telepathy* and a *ring of mind shielding*), *Zagyg's component case, ring of comfort* (protects from both extremes of natural temperature much like a *ring of warmth* does for cold), a vial of *oil of fiery burning,* a gold-hilted *jambiya +2* that has the secondary power of *magic detection,* a jade scroll tube (worth 750 gp) holding two scrolls: #1 has *affect normal fires, hold portal, sleep, fire truth*, fire charm, sunwarp*, limited wish.* #2 has *spider climb, burning hands, sundazzle*, flame arrow, dispel mirage*, fire track*, flesh mirage*.* Yâcût's last item is a gold necklace with five skull pendants. Each of these is a small bottle holding the following potions: *rainbow hues, treasure finding, levitation, invisibility,* and *healing.* The necklace is worth 1,200 gp for its artistry.

* These spells are described in the AL-QADIM *Arabian Adventures* sourcebook. Ω

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Rothgy and Rekken know about the secret passage.

Rothgy Frizzo: AL LE; AC 5; MV 12; T4; hp 16; THAC0 19; #AT 2 (short sword and dagger); Dmg by weapon type; SA two-weapon style specialization, backstab (×2); SD move silently (50%), hide in shadows (35%); S 12, D 17, C 10, I 15, W 12, Ch 11; ML 10; XP 270; leather armor, short sword, six daggers (five for throwing, one for hand-to-hand combat), potion of *invisibility* (one dose), keys (to trapped coffer in area **11** and padlock in area **14**).

Guards (2): hp 6 each; see area **2** for complete statistics.

14. Dolores' Cell. Dolores is being held in one of the three cells whose bars are still intact. The barred door is secured by a heavy chain and padlock. Rothgy carries the only key.

When found, Dolores is exhausted and weak. She wants to return to Pembrose immediately and will be extremely upset if the PCs suggest anything different. In fact, any hesitation results in a lecture on the proper treatment of a lady. This lecture is followed by other lectures on topics ranging from manners to politics to child rearing. (She believes her captors' abominable behavior is the result of overly-harsh parenting.) By the time the PCs deposit her in Warden's hands, they should be quite happy to say goodbye.

Dolores has heard her captors discussing Lord Grange, but she does not know why she was kidnapped. She does, however, suspect that a ransom note has been sent and is disturbed that Warden has thus far declined to pay it. If the PCs know of Warden's grief, and the reasons for his not paying the ransom, and if they choose to inform Dolores of what they know, she is be greatly relieved and appreciative. Otherwise, Warden will have some explaining to do when she gets home.

Dolores is unreliable in combat, but she's surprisingly feisty and won't let herself be captured a second time.

Dolores Grange: AL LG; AC 10; MV 12; 0-level; hp 4; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; ML 10; unarmed.

15. Usable Cells. Like the cell holding Dolores, these still have bars. There are chains and padlocks sitting in the cells. Should the PCs be captured, this is where they will be kept. A guard will be stationed outside the cells at all times to discourage escape attempts.

16. Empty Cells. These cells are useless now that they have no doors. Some contain orange peels, onion skins, moldy bread, and small animal bones.

17. Old Armory. Garbage is piled in one corner: bones, waste, wood, and ashes. There are empty stone shelves carved into all the walls.

18. Second Armory. Like area **17**, this is an armory with large stone shelves carved out of the walls. Examination of the eastern wall reveals that the dust and dirt have been moved away from the floor in the northeast corner. A large stone block can be removed, revealing the secret room beyond (area **20**).

19. Torture Chamber. Not much is left in this old chamber. Rusted shackles are still affixed to the north and south walls.

20. Secret Chamber. This chamber is full of debris and cobwebs. A tunnel leads to a secret trap door under tower **1d**. There are handholds carved into the stone beneath the trap door for climbing. Rothgy uses this passage as his means of escape from the keep.

Concluding the Adventure

A grateful Warden gladly pays 750 gp for the safe return of Dolores, and PCs should receive 1,000 XP for returning her alive. What's more, the PCs have a friend in Pembrose from that day forward. However, if Warden rewards the PCs in front of Dolores, a domestic squabble ensues. Dolores does not feel the PCs should be given financial compensation for her safe return, insisting that her rescue is reward enough. Warden, on the other hand, feels guilty that he was unable to rescue her himself and wishes to pay the PCs to feel he contributed more than tears to her recovery. (The DM can work out this domestic squabble any way he or she sees fit.)

If the PCs wish to see Lord Grange brought to justice, they have a steep hill to climb. If they go to Armen and inform him of what they know, he thanks them and promises to look into the matter (assuming he's on speaking terms with the party). PCs might attempt to gain an audience with the Governor of Pembrose; however, if they've gone public with their desire to see Lord Grange arrested, the Governor flatly refuses to see them, not wanting to become involved in such a sticky affair. If they do receive an audience, the alarmed Governor will simply defer the PCs to the local constabulary.

If the PCs inform Warden that his father was behind the caper, he is stunned by the accusation and visits his father, demanding to know the truth. Lord Grange fervently denies the accusations. Only the testimony of Rekken Filsner has any chance of convicting him. (Even then, it's Lord Grange's word against the word of a kidnapper and disgruntled ex-employee.)

In any event, distrust among the Granges and Bankheads persists until the matter is resolved. PCs who harass or help to imprison Lord Grange earn his eternal derision. Ω

DUNGEON® Adventures
Issue #69

Cover by Jeff Easley

❖ ***"Sleep of Ages" by Eric L. Boyd, AD&D® FORGOTTEN REALMS® adventure, levels 5–7.***

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Skydancer the centaur takes aim at an irksome foe.

STEPPING STONES

BY LISA SMEDMAN

Is an ancient riddle worth your life?

Artwork by Rags Morales
Cartography by Diesel

Eleven years ago, Lisa visited Stonehenge on a cold and blustery day. Clouds scudded across the sky, rain bent the grass at her feet, and she watched as a blind visitor was allowed to bypass the barriers and touch the stones. That experience emerges in this adventure, one of many Lisa has written for TSR over the years.

"Stepping Stones" is an AD&D® adventure for 4–6 characters of levels 6–8 (about 36 total levels). It contains a balance of roleplaying and fighting; at least two members of the group should be experienced fighters. A bard would also be useful for dealing with the korred. At least one PC should possess the navigation secondary skill or proficiency.

Due to the racial prejudices of the centaurs they meet in this adventure, the PCs will have an easier time if at least one of them is an elf. Dwarves will have a difficult time conducting civil dealings with the centaurs, and halflings and gnomes are likely to be lumped into the same category on the basis of their short stature.

The adventure is set in a remote wilderness area. It assumes that the campaign world has a north pole (and a star that marks the direction north) and at least one moon, and that the sun and any moons rise in the east. The moon is not named in this adventure. Should the DM wish to set the adventure in a southern hemisphere with a southern pole star, or should the world rotate so that its sun and moons rise in the west, the directions given in the map's verses must be adjusted accordingly.

One of the NPCs encountered in this scenario is a psionicist. *The Complete Psionics Handbook* will be useful in running Helgoth Dotterfeer.

Adventure Background

The Murkstone Hills were not always an unknown blank on the map. Centuries ago, they were a valued outpost of an ancient dwarven kingdom that mined much of its wealth from this region. The dwarven miners were in constant conflict with the centaurs who ranged across these grassy hills, and for decades there were pitched battles, and much blood

was shed on either side. In time, the centaur herds were reduced to a shadow of what they had been.

The dwarves claimed victory, but their celebrations were short-lived. The unique race of centaurs that roamed the Murkstone Hills had played a vital role in the region's ecology. As fire-breathing creatures, they were the only natural enemies of the trolls that plagued this region. Now free to roam without impediment, the trolls multiplied at an alarming rate and ravaged the mining camps of the dwarves. Not willing to pay so high a price for their gold, the dwarves abandoned the Murkstone Hills.

The balance was eventually restored through the efforts of a clan of korred, who took it upon themselves to eliminate the trolls in a most creative fashion. The korred were in possession of the *Crown of Lapis*, a magical item whose origins are shrouded in mystery. They first lured the trolls into joining their compelling dance and then used the crow to turn them to stone. The results can be seen dotting the Murkstone Hills: circles of freestanding stones whose weathered surfaces tend to evoke thoughts of vaguely humanoid shapes, frozen in mid-step.

The dwarven kingdom has long since vanished. The shafts its miners dug have collapsed, leaving only gentle scars on the landscape. Only the regularity of these valleys betrays their unnatural origin.

Although the dwarves departed, the centaur herds never fully recovered and remain small to this day. As for the korred, their descendants have reverted to a more primitive state and retain only the faintest memories of the time when their ancestors mastered and subdued the fierce race of trolls.

Modern korred have no memory of where the *Crown of Lapis* lies. But there was one witness to its final resting place: a dwarven miner who was one of the last to flee this region. Thessalus Bluevin recorded on a map the site where the *Crown of Lapis* was buried after its final use, describing the crown's exact location in the form of a riddle. He also included notes on how to use the crown to recover the plundered gold that the trolls had been carrying—gold that had been turned to coarse stone, together with the trolls. These notes omitted, however, any specific mention of either korred or trolls.

Bluevin rejoined civilization, only to die in a tavern brawl before he could mount an expedition to recover the king's ransom in gold. His map, its cryptic message undeciphered, was passed down through several generations of the Bluevin family. For nearly 200 years it collected dust. Then, the only living descendant of Thessalus Bluevin sold it for a few coppers to the owner of a curio shop.

Helgoth Dotterfeer, the blind owner of the shop, used her psionic powers to learn more about the faded vellum parchment she had purchased. She succeeded beyond her wildest dreams, tracing the history of the map back five centuries, to a miner named Thessalus Bluevin. She used magical spectacles in her shop to read the writing on the document and realized it was a treasure map.

Helgoth doubts that the location on the map can ever be found or that the treasure is still there after all those centuries. But perhaps money can still be made selling the map to a party of gullible adventurers ...

Starting the Adventure

The adventure begins with the PCs visiting a small provincial town on the outskirts of civilization. Built atop the rubble of an ancient city whose name and history are lost to memory, the town of Bywater is home to a mixed-race collection of merchants and artisans. Simple stone buildings with slate-shingled roofs line broad streets that were obviously cobbled in ancient times. A glance at the stone rubble reveals that the stonework shows the refinement and skill of dwarven masons.

While the PCs are visiting Bywater, they meet Helgoth Dotterfeer. Helgoth has long, silver-gray hair that she wears in braids coiled in a bun at the back of her head. She has a short, silvery beard divided into tiny braids, each decorated with brightly colored threads and hung with a silver moon or star.

Helgoth's most arresting feature is her eyes. Cataracts have turned them a milky white, and she is completely blind. Her psionic powers allow her to move about in the world as well as a sighted person, however. She also uses psionics (object reading) to gain information on the curios she buys for her shop.

Ideally, the PCs are already searching for an unusual item or spell component and have been directed to Helgoth's curio shop. Alternatively, Helgoth recognizes the PCs as adventurers and approaches them on the street, in a tavern, or at the local adventurer's guild hall with her request, explaining that since they are well traveled and presumably conversant in other languages, they might be able to translate something for her.

Helgoth asks the PCs for their help with the map she "recently acquired." She knows that there are runes upon it; she says the dwarf who sold it to her had told her that much. But she pretends not to realize that it is a treasure map. She asks the PCs' to help translate the dwarven runes, claiming that her blindness prevents her from reading them. (Observant PCs might notice that Helgoth moves with the confidence of a sighted person; she says this is due to her acute hearing.)

The map is drawn in faded black ink on centaur hide. It bears the titles "Murkstone" and "The Crossed Circle," and it shows the location of a circle of freestanding stones. In one corner are dwarven runes, penned in a script not used for centuries. PCs who speak and read Dwarvish and who also possess the ancient languages proficiency can read the runes, but they are unintelligible to those who speak and read only modern Dwarvish. Alternatively, the spell *comprehend languages* can be used to decipher them.

If neither of these options is available to the PCs, Helgoth "blindly" searches the shelves in her shop, eventually finding a pair of magical spectacles that have the ability to decipher mundane scripts; however, they do not allow the reader to comprehend magical writing. Like everything else in the shop, the *spectacles of comprehending languages* are for sale: the asking price is 1,200 gp.

Helgoth feigns reluctance about parting with the map once its runes have been deciphered and tries to get the best price possible for it. But the

truth is, she's happy to get even a single gold piece, since she paid so little for it and considers the map valueless. She is not interested in accompanying the PCs on a treasure hunt but offers to sell the map at a "substantial discount" for a percentage of what the PCs might find.

The riddle at the bottom of the map reads as follows:

Thou shalt know when the time is right. Celestial orb wears first horns this night. Stand to shun the northern star. Atop the stone that from south is far. Seek the stones the horns first connect. The sinister stone is the one correct. Circle withershins four stones more. Greet the dawn, move two stones more. Withershins circle again one stone. Balance south and west, cross the circle home. Imagine another stone laid down. Dig in this spot to find the crown.

Translation: Stand atop the northern stone on a night when the moon (celestial orb) is a new crescent (first horns) with your back to the north star (shunning it) so that you are facing due south. Watch the moon to see which two stones the tips of its crescent (horns) connect. Do this when the moon is rising (first connect) rather than setting. Begin from the left (sinister) stone. Travel counterclockwise (withershins) around the circle for four stones. Face east (greet the dawn), and move straight ahead for two stones. Travel counter-clockwise around the circle one stone. Face due southwest (balance south and west). Cross the circle, passing the center stone, to the stone you are facing. Imagine that one more stone lies ahead, in a line with the two stones you have just passed and at the same distance apart. The crown is buried here (see page 57). The *Crown of Lapis* is fully detailed in the "New Magical Item" sidebar on page 60.

If questioned about the origins of the map, Helgoth tells the PCs that the map was created five centuries ago by a dwarven miner named Thessalus Bluevin, and that it was passed down through the Bluevin family after Thessalus died in a tavern brawl. She has no idea what the symbols on the map mean (although she can guess that they represent a circle of stones, since these are common in the Murkstone Hills). She also has no clue what the text might mean, aside from the fact that it seems to dive directions to a treasure of some sort. She does not know anything about the *Crown of Lapis*, trolls, centaurs, or korred.

Helgoth Dotterfeer (dwarf): AL NG; AC 9; MV 6; Psi 2; hp 4; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; S 12, D 13, C 15, I 17, W 18, Ch 12; SZ S (3'6" tall); ML 12; PSPs 52; dagger.

Psionic sciences: Object reading.

Psionic devotions: All-round vision, danger sense, feel light, hear light, radial navigation.

Psionic defenses: Mind blank, thought shield.

Following the Map

Helgoth or anyone else in Bywater can point the PCs in the direction of the Murkstone Hills. If they ask about this region, the PCs are told the following:

> "The Murkstone Hills are desolate and pathless, roamed only by nomadic half-men. Their domain is a rolling sea of grassy, mist-swept hills dotted by craggy outcroppings of moss-patched granite.
>
> "It is said that the half-men dance by moonlight. Tales are told of hoofed creatures who gallivant nose to tail, crowning the hillsides with perfect circles of scorched grass. The piper whose mad tune they heed is unknown, and their dance is as wild as the winds that blow.
>
> "Beware those scarred hills. Ancient magic lingers there."

Into the Murkstone Hills

From Bywater, one enters the Murkstone Hills after a journey of about a week. The ancient cobblestone road that leads out of Bywater gradually peters out, becoming first a dirt track and then a mere footpath. It eventually disappears beneath an overgrowth of grass and shrubs as it enters the hills. An experienced tracker can follow it to the first of the abandoned and collapsed dwarven mines.

The Murkstone Hills are desolate. Little grows here but grass and low, thorny shrubs. Chilling winds and driving rainstorms are frequent. While the hills themselves are gently rolling, several are crisscrossed with deep scars (the collapsed mines). A number of the taller hills bear free-standing granite stones. Some stand alone; others are arranged in rough circles. All are shrouded in patches of fog. Traveling through the Murkstone Hills, characters cannot escape the utter loneliness of this place.

To find the ring of stones shown on Bluevin's map, the PCs could use magic. The sixth-level priest spell *find the path* is the best option, but there is a catch. If the spell is used to find "a circle of stones," it leads the priest to the nearest stone circle—not necessarily the one Bluevin mapped. If used to find "a circle of 13 stones," the spell does not work; one of the stones in the circle Bluevin mapped was shattered by lightning years ago, so only 12 stones remain intact.

A wizard could *teleport* to the correct circle of stones but faces the twin dangers of teleporting to somewhere he or she has "never seen" and of arriving there without the other PCs as backup.

A *locate object* spell is no help to the PCs; the caster has never seen the *Crown of Lapis* and cannot form a mental image of it.

Fly spells used for aerial surveillance are effective. The caster has a cumulative 5% chance per hour of finding the correct circle of stones. There is also a 5% cumulative chance that the flying character is spotted and attacked by a lone manticore out surveying its "domain."

Manticore: INT low (7); AL LE; AC 4; MV 12, Fl 18 (E); HD 6+3; hp 49; THAC0 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1d3/1d3/1d8; SA tail spikes; SZ H; ML 14; XP 975; *MM*/246.

The Murkstone Centaurs

Without magic, the PCs need some assistance. Their best guides are the Murkstone centaurs, who range far and wide across these desolate hills. The centaurs know all of the local landmarks and can guide the PCs to the circle mapped by Bluevin once they see the map.

Unfortunately, the centaurs retain a strong racial hatred of dwarves that dates back five centuries. If any of the PCs are dwarves, the centaurs immediately challenge them and, given even the slightest provocation,

attack. To secure a guide, the PCs must capture one of the centaurs alive and force it to lead them to the stones—while dealing with repeated attacks by the remaining centaurs as they seek to free this captive.

If the party includes halflings or gnomes (but no dwarves), these individuals are mistaken for dwarves; the PCs must speak quickly and convincingly to avoid a hostile confrontation with the Murkstone centaurs. Even if battle is avoided, the centaurs remain openly suspicious and unfriendly toward these races, and they do not speak to these characters.

The centaurs react favorably to elves, whom they admire and respect. They are ambivalent toward humans. If the party is composed entirely of elves and/or humans, the centaurs greet them in a friendly manner, readily agreeing to serve as guides.

The centaurs are a proud race who still reminisce about the golden era before the dwarves came, when vast herds of centaurs roamed these hills. They talk about the dwarven gold mines and the battles once fought here. If asked about the region's dangers, they mention that trolls used to be commonplace, centuries ago, but that only the occasional troll still roams the Murkstone Hills. The only other threat faced by the centaurs is the occasional manticore.

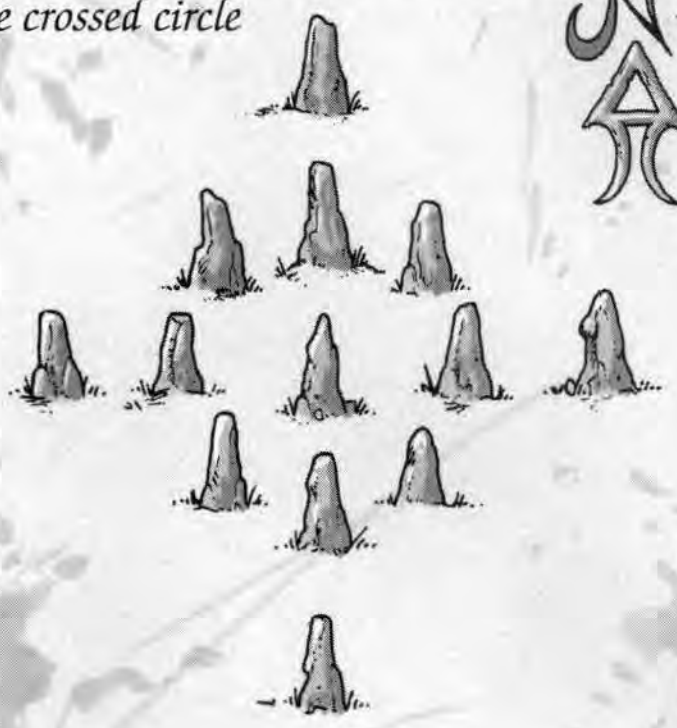
The centaurs rarely see the korred and believe them to be a unique race of dwarves. They know that these "goat-hoofed dwarves" show a keen interest in working stone, and that they use magic to do so (unlike the dwarves of old, who used iron tools).

The centaurs refuse to approach the stone circles themselves; they will not climb any of the hills that are topped with these megaliths. They are terrified of the standing stones and warn the PCs about "evil magics" at work there. They can offer no rational explanation of this belief, only an ancient poem that has been handed down as a warning through the centuries:

By dead of night, the dance is done,
And those who join see not the sun.
Between, betwixt the standing stones,
The revelers lead the foul ones home
And mark the hill with granite ring;
This be done by the lapis king.

Murkstone Hills

the crossed circle



The crown of Lapis is a powerful thing.
Use its power to break the ring.
Chant corpus ex lapis! and then behold.
Granite stone shall turn to gold.
Other uses has this crown,
But this be the best one that I have found.

❂ ❂ ❂

Thou shalt know when the time is right. Celestial orb wears first horns this night. Stand to shun the the northern star. Atop the stone that from south is far. Seek the stones the horns first connect. The sinister stone is the one correct. Circle withershins four stones more. Greet the dawn, move two stones more. Withershins circle again one stone. Balance south and west, cross the circle home. Imagine another stone laid down. Dig in this spot to find the crown.

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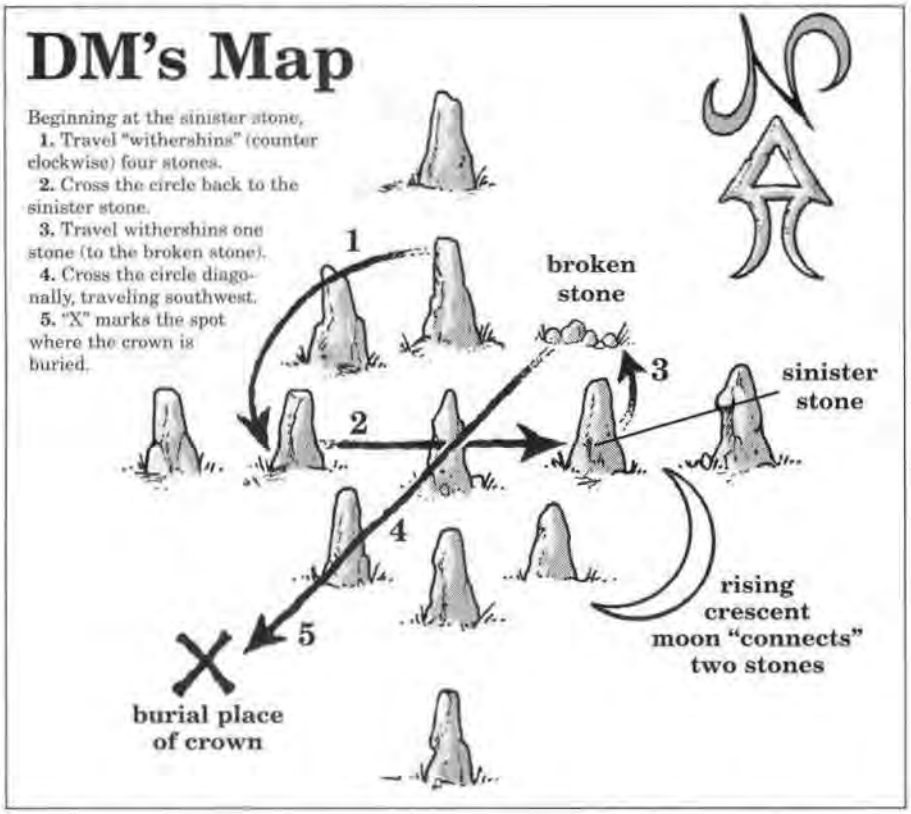
DM's Map
Beginning at the sinister stone,
1. Travel "withershins" (counter clockwise) four stones.
2. Cross the circle back to the sinister stone.
3. Travel withershins one stone (to the broken stone).
4. Cross the circle diagonally, traveling southwest.
5. "X" marks the spot where the crown is buried.
1
broken stone
3
sinister stone
2
4
rising crescent moon "connects" two stones
5
burial place of crown

Shun ye the stones that crown the hills.
Manifold are its grievous ills.

Murkstone centaurs (8): INT average (8–10); AL CG; AC 5; MV 18; HD 4; hp 15 each; THAC0 17; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 1d6/1d6 (hooves) plus 1d6 (club), or 1d8 (sheaf arrow); SA breathe fire; SZ L (8–9' tall); ML 13; XP 420 (650 for Skydancer); *MM*/41.

These fire-breathing centaurs are unique to the Murkstone Hills. Three times per day, a Murkstone centaur can breathe out a cone of fire that has the same properties as a single draught of a potion of *fiery breath*. This cone extends 20 feet and has a 10' diameter. It inflicts 1d10+2 hp damage (save vs. breath weapon for half damage). If this special attack is used, the centaur may not make another attack during that round.

Four of the centaurs carry clubs; four carry long bows with 25 sheaf arrows each. Each centaur carries 2d4 gp and 1d4 gems (10 gp value each) in a small pouch that hangs around the creature's waist like a sporran.

One of the centaurs (Skydancer) is clad in magical horseshoes that have the same properties as *winged boots*. She can use these to fly for up to two hours per day at a speed of 21 (C). If the centaurs do battle with the PCs, she leaps into the air and attacks from above, either swooping down to strafe the PCs with a cone of fire or shooting arrows from a safe height.

Firemane (Murkstone centaur leader): INT average (10); AL CG; AC 4 (with shield); MV 18; HD 5; hp 20; THAC0 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1d6/1d6 (hooves) and 1d6+1 (medium horse lance); SA breathe fire; MR see below; SZ L (9' tall); ML 14; XP 650; *MM*/41.

Firemane (Skydancer's mate) was named for his striking red hair and beard. Chosen as the tribe's leader due to his level head (he is not nearly as chaotic as the others in his small tribe), he wears the group's magical item: a *ring of spell turning*. He carries 5 gp and four gems (10 gp value each) in a sporran-like pouch.

Swiftwind (Murkstone centaur priest): INT average (10); AL CG; AC 5; MV 18; HD 5; hp 20; THAC0 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1d6/1d6 (hooves) and 1d6 (club); SA breathe fire; SD +2 to saves vs. fire or electrical attack; SZ L (9' tall); ML 14; XP 975; *MM*/41.

Druidic spells (cast at 3rd level): *cause fear, entangle, faerie fire; silence 15' radius.*

Swiftwind targets her *silence 15' radius* spell on the party spellcaster. She also uses *cause fear* (reversed remove fear) to send the most formidable fighter in the group scurrying away. If fighting at night, she puts *faerie fire* to good advantage, using it to illuminate the tribe's opponents and make them easier for the centaurs to hit.

Swiftwind carries 4 gp and two gems (10 gp value each) in a sporran-like pouch. She also has three scrolls that bear the following priest spells: *command, cure light wounds,* and *shillelagh*, which she uses in battle if given the opportunity.

The Crossed Circle

When the PCs at last locate the circle of stones mapped by Bluevin, read the following to the players:

> Climbing to the top of a grassy hill, an eerie feeling of familiarity overcomes you. Atop the hill are the monumental stones as marked on your map.
>
> Dark clouds scud across the sky, and patches of mist cling to the hillside, shrouding the base of the stones. Wind gusts around the hill, causing the grass to bend and whisper. A few drops of rain spatter down.
>
> The stones themselves are of rough granite, patched with lichen and moss. you suspect they might once have been carved; the contours of the stones suggest that they are more than simple slabs of rock.
>
> There are 12 megaliths in all, arranged in the "crossed circle" shown on the map. The thirteenth stone, however, lies in pieces upon the ground. It is impossible to tell what caused it to shatter; perhaps the elements caused a natural flaw in the rock to fracture.

Dancing Dervishes

To find the *Crown of Lapis* using Bluevin's map, the PCs must reach the circle of stones when the moon is new. (It remains "new" and in crescent form for three nights.) The sky may be obscured by clouds at first,

causing some concern, but these conveniently clear away at dusk, just as the moon is about to rise.

On this night, the PCs are met with an unexpected surprise: a clan of korred appear within the circle, each emerging from a different standing stone via his or her *stone door* ability. The eight hairy, muscular little people emerge dancing to the music of the pipes, drums, and harps that they carry.

The dance is a commemoration of the transformation of the trolls to stone. It is a celebration that is held every time the moon is new, each time at a different circle. Unfortunately for the PCs, on this particular occasion the korred have chosen the circle of stones mapped by Bluevin.

The PCs, having unwittingly interrupted the korred dance, must each make a successful saving throw vs. spells or be caught up in it. Those who begin to dance lose 1d4 hp per round danced until they either fall unconscious or are restrained (or until the korred are forced to break off their dance and flee). If all of the PCs succumb, they awaken the next day at dawn, stripped of many of their possessions. If the korred find Bluevin's map, they burn it; the PCs recover only a few charred scraps of centaur hide—but nothing of use.

The chaotic korred assume the PCs are threatening but do not immediately attack. Instead they defend themselves using their magical laugh. Those within 60 feet of a laughing korred must roll their Charisma or higher on 1d20 or be stunned for 1d4 rounds.

If the PCs can convince the korred that they are friendly, they can converse with them. These little folk speak poor Common, but they no longer remember the origin of the standing stones (i.e., they do not remember that the stones are transformed trolls). They know only that their race placed them here and that their dance commemorates an event that took place centuries ago. But the song that they sing while dancing does provide a clue, if the PCs are alert enough to listen carefully:

Dance! Dance! The clan king cries.
Dance! Dance! Under moonlit skies.
Dance! Dance! Come join our fun.
Dance until our work is done!

A greedy halfling finds more than treasure atop Murkstone Hill.

New Magical Item

The Crown of Lapis

The *Crown of Lapis* is a unique magical item, made from three strands of metal (gold, silver, and iron) that have been braided together to form a simple circle. Each of the strands is patterned to resemble a snake swallowing its own tail. The crown is activated by speaking the correct command words. The command words are etched on the inside of the crown:

Corpus ex lapis: Activates a *stone to flesh* spell, affecting one target within 120 yards. The spell can be reversed by reversing the order of the words to *lapis ex corpus*. If used to return flesh creatures that were previously turned to stone by the crown itself, the crown transforms all such creatures within hearing range of the command word. If used to return to flesh creatures that were previously turned to stone by other means (a wizard's spell or medusa's gaze, for example), it transforms one creature per use (a maximum of one creature per round). In either case, a system shock roll is required.

Lapis cutis: Duplicates the fourth-level wizard's spell *stoneskin*.

Lapis asylum: Duplicates the third-level priest's spell *meld into stone*.

Lapis clavus: Duplicates the fifth-level priest's spell *spike stones*.

The crown must be worn to activates any of its powers.

XP Value: 5,000 **GP Value:** 15,000

Clear the hills of the evil scourge.
The undying ones are those we purge.
Dance! Dance! Join our hilltop ring.
Dance! Dance! With the crowned clan king.
Dance! Dance! With feet like stone.
Remain behind while we dance home.

Korred (8): INT very (11–12); AL CN; AC 5; MV 9; HD 6+1; hp 22 each; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+4 (cudgel) or 1d2+4 (fist); SA hurl rocks 100 feet (2d8 hp damage); SD laugh (usable 3/day); MR 25%; SZ S (3' tall); ML 13; XP 1,400; *MM*/308 (satyr).

Innate abilities: *stone shape, animate rock, stone door* (teleport 30 feet), *shatter rock, transmute rock to mud, stone tell.*

Because they are far from home, the korred carry only minimal treasure with them. Each carries, in the pockets of his or her leather trousers, 2d10 sp, 3d6 gp, and 1d4 pp.

Once of the korred carries a set of pan pipes that have the same properties as an *eversmoking bottle*. When blown (the pipes are soundless), the pipes spew forth smoke that fills a 40' diameter area within one round, totally obscuring vision within this area. The smoke dissipates beyond this point, but if the instrument continues to be played, the smoke is replenished within a 40' diameter of the person playing them. The korred use these magical pipes if the battle turns against them and they need to flee, since they themselves can not see clearly while within it. They use their *stone door* ability to escape.

Return of the Trolls

If the PCs successfully deal with the korred and use the new moon to solve Bluevin's riddle, they can locate the spot where the *Crown of Lapis* is buried. It lies three feet below the surface, inside the rotted remains of a wooden chest.

While the chest has disintegrated, the gold lock that once sealed it remains intact—as does the poison needle trap inside the lock. The PCs might be lured by the lock's golden gleam, but anyone who picks up the lock springs its trap and is injected with Type B poison (onset time 2d6 rounds; Dmg 20/1d3). The crown itself lies a few inches below this lock.

The crown's powers are detailed in the adjacent sidebar. As soon as the command words "*corpus ex lapis*" are spoken, all 13 trolls revert back to flesh. They immediately resume the activity they were engaged in at the time of their initial transformation: dancing. For one round, the 12 intact trolls lumber about, their rubbery limbs flailing in an obscene parody of the graceful korred dance. But on the second round of their restoration, they suddenly realize their ravenous hunger and notice that breakfast has been served, in the form of the PCs.

When first restored to flesh, the trolls have lost hit points as a result of being turned to stone and weathered by the elements. Each troll thus begins with 34 hp minus 2d4 hp. (Roll separately for each troll.) These hit points are quickly regenerated at a rate of 3 hp/round.

In addition, the thirteenth troll is in pieces, having been shattered in stone form years ago. The two severed arms and severed head of this troll can attack, but only if a PC is foolish or unlucky enough to come close to them. This last troll has lost 20 hp; if it regains these hit points through regeneration, the troll should be considered "whole" again, having knitted together its severed pieces.

Each troll carries a large sack containing 5d4 balls of gold. This treasure was looted from the dwarven miners centuries ago and was also turned to stone. (The trolls were carrying the sacks at the time of their transformation.)

The dwarven miners smelted their wealth and cast it into balls. Each ball of gold is about the size of a softball, is worth 500 gp, and is stamped with ancient dwarven runes in the same script as that found on Bluevin's map. The inscription reads "Royal Mines."

Trolls normally have no use for treasure (except as a means of luring sentient, edible creatures to their clutches). However, these gold balls make excellent missile weapons. The trolls can hurl them up to 30 yards, inflicting 1d8 hp damage on a successful attack.

Perhaps the safest way to deal with the trolls is to turn them back into stone by reversing the command words for the *Crown of Lapis*, but this could mean losing the gold. Any golden balls still carried by the trolls revert back to granite at the time the trolls are turned to stone.

Trolls (12 intact, 1 severed): INT low (5–7); AL CE; AC 4; MV 12; HD 6+6; hp 34 (–2d4 hp) each; THAC0 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4+4/1d4+4 (claws) and 1d8+4 (bite), or 1d8 (gold ball); SA attack up to three different foes; severed limbs can attack; SD regenerate 3 hp/round; SZ L (9' tall); ML 14; XP 1,400; *MM*/349.

Further Adventures

If they were successful in gaining the trolls' gold, the PCs might be tempted to use the *Crown of Lapis* to turn other standing stones in the Murkstone Hills back into trolls (who may or may not be carrying treasure, at the DM's discretion). By doing so, they incur the wrath of the korred, who are angry to see the stones "undone." The korred are very intelligent and begin to seed the megaliths with a number of devious and deadly traps, both magical and mundane, in an effort to stop the PCs.

One of the korred's favorite traps is to seed an area with animated, entangling ropes. Made from braided korred hair, the ropes are AC 1, have 5 hp each, and MV 3. They lash out at intruders, entangling them on a successful hit; victims must cut their way free of the writhing ropes to escape. For a more deadly trap, the korred smear the ropes with Type N poison.

If hard pressed, the korred might also persuade a family of galeb duhr into protecting a stone circle. The galeb duhr attack any non-korred who disturbs the standing stones.

Galeb duhr (3): INT very (12); AL N; AC –2; MV 6; HD 10, 9, 8; hp 62, 55, 32; THAC0 11 (9–10 HD) or 13 (8–HD); #AT 2; Dmg 2d8, 3d6, or 4d6; SA animate boulders; SD spell-like abilities; MR 20%; SZ L (8–12' tall); ML 17; XP 1,000/HD; *MM*/122.

Magical abilities (cast once/day, at 20th-level): *move earth, stone shape* (at will), *passwall, transmute rock to mud, wall of stone.*

Galeb duhr suffer double damage from cold-based attacks and save at –4 against such attacks.

The Murkstone Hills hold many other secrets. A number of unusual creatures can be found there, as can the ruins of dwarven fortifications and mining settlements. Ancient battlegrounds could be a source of magical dwarven armor or weapons—and of malevolent ghosts of the restless dead. Abandoned mines might provide even more gold to those brave enough to explore them. Ω

The Oops File!

There were some minor errors in "Training Ground" (Issue #67) that have since been brought to our attention. In area W17 of Orokoth's dungeon (page 44–45), the text mentions that a "permanently enspelled" magical item is required to open the north and south doors of the room. However, the example given is incorrect. "A small coin treated with a *light* spell" is insufficient; the item must be treated with a *continual light* spell—or some other spell of unlimited duration—to permanently enchant the item.

We've also reproduced a corrected version of Sememmon's letter to Dalmanu that appeared on page 38:

Dalmanu —

You are instructed to cease current surveillance of Hills Edge. Gather all available Zhentilar soldiers and proceed immediately to the east edge of the Dusk Wood, directly north of the Leaning Stone. There you will search for an ancient path composed of five stone tiles. Travel in secrecy and kill anyone encountered en route.

Signal me when you arrive at the pathway. Touch the sigils in order: Spider, Arrowhead, Eye, Snake, and the path will teleport your group underground. Investigate the area fully before attempting to return to the surface. Report your findings to me directly. The lost Art you reclaim is of great importance in our struggle against the Harpers and the Great Enemy.

Success or failure will be rewarded in kind. Agents will be sent to assist in two days' time.

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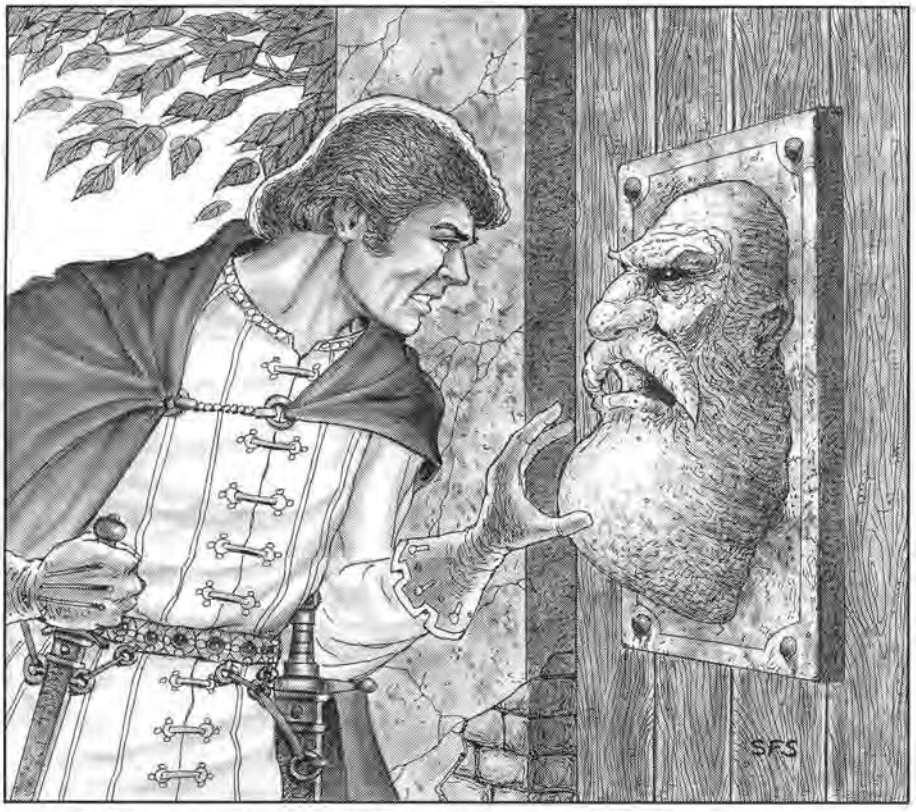


A grandfather plaque guards the entrance to the wizard's lair.

BY MERKLAN'S MAGIC

BY BRIAN CORVELLO

Nature gone awry

Artwork by Stephen Schwartz
Cartography by Diesel

Brian writes: "My parents' house in Connecticut has a large forest in the backyard. As a boy, I'd go down to the woods and imagine it full of dryads, wood elves, and treants. This adventure is dedicated to those memories."

"By Merklan's Magic" is a generic AD&D® adventure for 4–8 PCs of levels 5–9 (about 40 total levels). The PCs should be good in alignment. A druid or ranger would feel right at home in this wilderness adventure, and the party would benefit from having one or two fighters and a powerful wizard. The characters should possess a few magical weapons.

The adventure assumes that it is spring or summer in the DM's campaign world; the primary antagonists are not climatized to the winter. The adventure takes place entirely in the confines of a forest located in temperate climes.

The module uses several monsters from the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Annual* appendices, as well as a monster normally reserved for the RAVENLOFT® setting. However, enough information is given here to run the adventure.

For the Players

The adventure begins as the PCs are traveling north toward the city of Serendipity. The reason they have for going there is up to the DM; perhaps they are members or owners of a caravan, were dispatched by another party, or are in need of supplies.

To get to the city, the PCs must first pass through the mining colony of Taer-Amde in the southern hills. Built around a rich emerald mine, the colony is run by some 50 dwarves and is little more than a collection of tents and makeshift shelters. Then the PCs must traverse the Burrwood Forest which, until now, was a peaceful and beautiful place.

After being in the Taer-Amde for a few hours, the PCs are asked by one of the dwarves to come to the foreman's lodging. The dwarf promises, "It'll be worth your while, and you might find it interesting."

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs arrive at the foreman's shelter. Note that the actual interaction should not be a monologue but more of a conversation:

The foreman's lodge is small and plain. The only real object of beauty in his office is a 7' tall stone statue of a dwarf. The statue has a pick for one hand and a hammer for the other. After you are ushered in, a rather burly dwarf enters from another door.

"Greetings, friends! I am Bergon Goldhammer."

The dwarf pours several glasses of wine from a cask and passes one glass to each of you. "We drink to Moradin, the Soul-Forger! Well! I see you are hearty lads and lasses. Maybe you can help us with the problem we're having."

Bergon Goldhammer (dwarven priest of Moradin): AL LG; AC 3; MV 5 (6 unarmored); P5; hp 35; THAC0 18 #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; S 14; D 12; C 16; I 12; W 12; Ch 15 (17 to dwarves due to granted powers); ML 12; *warhammer +1*, plate mail, holy symbol of Moradin.

As a boon of Moradin, Bergon has +2 to hit with hammers.

Spells: *cure light wounds, faerie fire, light; aid, slow poison, spiritual hammer, cure disease.*

Bergon's "statue" is actually Gort, a hammer golem that serves as the colony's major line of defense. Many unscrupulous thieves have tried to rob the colony, only to be sent fleeing by the mighty golem. If the PCs make no hostile moves, they have nothing to fear from Gort. However, in the unlikely event the PCs try to attack or steal from Bergon, the dwarf uses the golem to discourage them. Gort obeys only Bergon.

Gort (hammer golem): INT non; AL N; AC 0; MV 6, burrow 6; HD 14; hp 60; THAC0 7; #AT 2 (hammer/pick); Dmg 2d10/2d12; SA create pounding force (acts as a *repulsion* spell, also inflicts 4d6 hp damage, save for half) once/turn; SD +1 or better weapon to hit, immune to all spells except *wish* (normal effect) or *stone to flesh* (acts as a *heal* spell); SZ L (9' tall); ML 20; XP 13,000; *MC Annual 1.*

If the PCs ask what the problem is, Bergon elaborates:

"Well, we aren't having trouble with the mine, that's for sure. There's gotta be hundreds of emeralds in there.

"You see, we normally get supplies from Serendipity. But the supply wagon is two weeks late! Last week I sent a group to the city to get food and water—they ain't been seen since. I swear there's something nasty in Burrwood Forest.

"We're running out of supplies, what we need you to do is find out what's in that forest, and fast, before we starve. 'Course, we have lots to offer ..." The dwarf spills a bag on the table, revealing dozens of beautiful green gemstones.

Bergon assures them the gems are worth 5,000 gp. PCs may negotiate for half the payment in advance and half upon word that the forest is secure. Bergon has no desire for anything the PCs find; what they find is their own.

Bergon can offer little information about the forest, but he has heard a rumor that a wizard lives there. Otherwise, he knows of no unusual creatures that populate Burrwood Forest. The trade route through the forest is used often, both by the dwarves and by the humans of Serendipity, but few stray far from the road; those who have reported nothing.

For the Dungeon Master

Bergon is right in assuming that "something nasty" is preying on travelers. Over the last month, Burrwood has become home to some unusual bandits.

Until recently, the forest has been home to Merklan the transmuter. Merklan was an expert botanist and horticulturalist who preferred raising plants, trees, and shrubs to summoning fiends and conquering nations. So dedicated was he to plants that his vegetable creations were almost human in his eyes.

But "almost" wasn't good enough. Merklan wanted to create something that walked, something that spoke, something that was truly conscious. But try as he might, his plants were just plants.

One could imagine the wizard's excitement when he found a wandering treant walking through the woods. Confronting the treant, whose name was Goldenbark, Merklan asked for permission to perform a few experiments to unlock the secret of the treant's mobility and intelligence. Sensing the wizard's evil nature, Goldenbark scoffed and told him to "take a walk."

But Merklan wouldn't take "no" for an answer. Laboring for hours over a dark cauldron, he brewed a potion consisting of nightshade, ivy, and other poisonous plants, mixed with several of his own vile elixirs. He figured that this concoction could surely bend the treant to his will.

By the light of the moon, Merklan approached the sleeping treant and dribbled the potion on his roots, all while muttering his evil spell. The treant became hideously ugly, twisted and deformed. No longer a peaceful forest-protector, he was now a vicious carnivore.

But the treant proved hard to control. He refused to obey the wizard and wouldn't remain still for the experiments. Eventually, Merklan had to resort to poisoning the treant and threatening him with *fireballs.*

Merklan decided he had learned all he needed to know. He began work on a new magical item—a wand made from one of Goldenbark's roots. Merklan hoped the wand would enable him to create more sentient plants. He called it the *wand of the forest bane.*

But the proud wizard was unable to test the wand. The treant overcame the poison in his system and viciously tore into the lab, attacking the befuddled wizard. With most of his spells spent in creating the wand, Merklan was easily overcome and quickly slain. In the fray, the wizard did manage to wound the treant with a *burning hands* spell. The conflagration scarred the treant, who thereafter became known as Scortchbark.

Scortchbark looked around at the destruction he had caused. Satisfied, he started to rifle through the wizard's clothes, curiously hoping to find something useful. He found the wand and a set of notes. The notes detailed the spells used in making the wand, as well as a command word—*bloknat.*

The treant took the wand, pointed it at a thorn bush, and muttered the command word, half-expecting the bush to be charred or disintegrated.

Instead, the bush slowly changed shape, sprouting crude appendages. After a few minutes, it transformed into a tall, zombie-like creature (a needleman). What's more, the creature willingly obeyed the treant, doing whatever he commanded.

Scortchbark has since experimented with the wand and used it to create many plant monsters—needlemen, mold men, thornies, and others. He set up three ambush spots along the road and other "stations" elsewhere in the forest. These troops have been ambushing travelers for the past two weeks. Scortchbark has amassed considerable treasure and a few good meals to boot. With his "army" growing, he might even lead an attack on Taer-Amde in the near future.

Even if the PCs refuse Bergon's offer, they must get past the plant army to reach Serendipity. The forest threat must be destroyed to make the trade route safe.

Getting Started

The dwarves of Taer-Amde have little to offer the PCs by way of help. Most of them are 0-level, and as noted, their supplies are low. Under no condition will Bergon lend them Gort; that would leave the colony defenseless.

The trip to the forest's edge is uneventful. When the PCs get to the entrance to the forest, read or paraphrase the following.

> The Burrwood Forest consists mostly of oaks and elms, with a few evergreens thrown in. A lone crow caws from its nest, then flies away.
>
> Out of the corner of your eyes you see something near a tree—something green. But when you turn to look at it, it's gone.

The PCs spotted a needleman, but it quickly disappears from view. A PC with the tracking proficiency can attempt to follow, but unless the PC has had experience tracking plant monsters, there is a –5 penalty to the roll. If successfully tracked, the needleman's trail leads to area **2**.

If the PCs decide to follow the road, they run into the three ambush spots (areas **1–3**). Scortchbark believes numerous ambushes are necessary in case prey gets past one or two. If the PCs decide to go into the forest itself, they might cross one of several trails leading to various other encounter locations.

If the PCs have some way of flying over the forest, they see nothing unusual. The treant has made clever use of his tree-animating ability to cover important areas of the forest with a thick canopy. The only interesting things the PCs spot are Arachlina's webs (area **4**) and the grassy clearing (area **5**). PCs who fly avoid the woodland encounters, but if they are working for the dwarves, they must land to investigate.

1. Every Rose Has Its Thorn.

> Up ahead, you see the road blocked by three odd plants. Eight feet in diameter, their leaves are pale white, and they are covered with yellow flowers resembling roses.

This is the first ambush site. The three "odd plants" are thornslingers created from ordinary grass by Scortchbark's wand. (Only a *wish* spell restores these, or any plant monsters, to normal.) As soon as the PCs come within 20 feet, the plants attack with their spraying thorns.

Scortchbark's other minions have orders to check this trap daily, bringing any treasure or meat to him. If the PCs decide to set up an ambush here, 1–6 needlemen arrive at noon or midnight, DM's choice. (See area **2** below for statistics.)

If the PCs defeat the deadly plants, they find no trace of the supply caravans or the dwarven scouts; obviously they weren't stopped here, or they were moved elsewhere. This should give the PCs incentive for continuing their investigation.

Thornslingers (3): INT non-; AL N; AC 8; MV 0; HD 4; hp 30, 28, 27; THAC0 automatically hits; #AT 1 (thorn volley); Dmg 2d4; SA sticky dew (Strength of 13 needed to break free); SZ M; ML 10; XP 270; *MM*/291.

2. On Pins and Needles. Hiding behind several trees surrounding this part of the road are ten needlemen, created by Scortchbark from shrubs and weeds.

The needlemen are 75% hidden from even active watchers, 40% from elves and rangers. They impose a –5 penalty to the PCs' surprise rolls (–2 for elves and rangers). When they strike, they leap out and start firing needles. They strike with their hands if the PCs come within melee range.

The needlemen's orders are to slay any non-plants that pass and bring bodies and treasure to their master. These monsters have little will of their own; if a speak with plant spell is used to communicate with them, they only reveal that their "master" wants them to guard the path. They do not know why or how long they will do it. When asked, they describe their master as a "burnt tree."

Needlemen (10): INT low; AL N; AC 6; MV 9; HD 3+4; hp 25 (×5), 23 (×3), 21 (×2); THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 3d4; SA fire 1d6 needles per round (20 foot range) for 1–2 hp damage each; SD direct magical attacks inflict triple damage; SZ M; ML12; XP 120; *MC Annual Volume Three*/82.

3. Moldy Oldies. The third ambush spot is much like the second, only it is manned by ten vegepygmies and five thornies constructed out of mushrooms and thorn bushes. Like the needlemen, the mold men can blend into their surroundings, imposing a –2 penalty to the PCs' surprise rolls.

The thornies attack first, giving the mold men time to size up the party. After three rounds, the vegepygmies attack from behind. These creatures, if subdued and spoken to, offer no more information than the needlemen, having low intelligence and little will of their own.

Mold men (10): INT low; AL N; AC 4; MV 12; HD 5; hp 37 (×5), 35 (×3), 32 (×2); THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 or by weapon; SA surprise; SD suffer only 1 hp damage from piercing weapons; immune to electricity and *charm* spells (except those affecting plants); always receives saving throw versus enchantments; SZ M; ML 10; XP 650; *MM*/256. Each mold man carries a crude spear.

Thornies (5): INT animal; AL N; AC 3; MV 15; HD 4; hp 25 (×3), 22 (×2); THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+1; SA rake if bite hits for 3d4 points damage; SZ M; ML 12; XP 175; *MM*/293.

Marauding needlemen scour Burrwood Forest for signs of intruders.

If the PCs survive the encounters in areas **1–3**, it should be clear that something is dreadfully wrong with the forest. This should spark further investigation and encourage them to travel off the path to search for the cause of the plant monsters.

4. Come Into My Parlor ...

> The forest is overgrown with tall elm trees. Between the trees are stretched rope-like strands. Upon closer inspection, they resemble huge spider webs.
>
> Suddenly, you think you see who made them. Fifty feet away from you, an enormous spider crawls down from a tree. It carries a long shawl in its mouth. The spider shrinks and changes, becoming less arachnid and more human. Within moments, it is no longer a spider but rather a young girl with long spindly arms and fingers.
>
> The spider-girl covers herself with the shawl and looks at you curiously, as if sizing you up.

The strange girl is Arachlina, a werespider. If the PCs attack her, she assumes spider form and tries to bind them with her webbing. Captured PCs are dragged to the road and left there. Only if her life is in danger does she use her lethal poison.

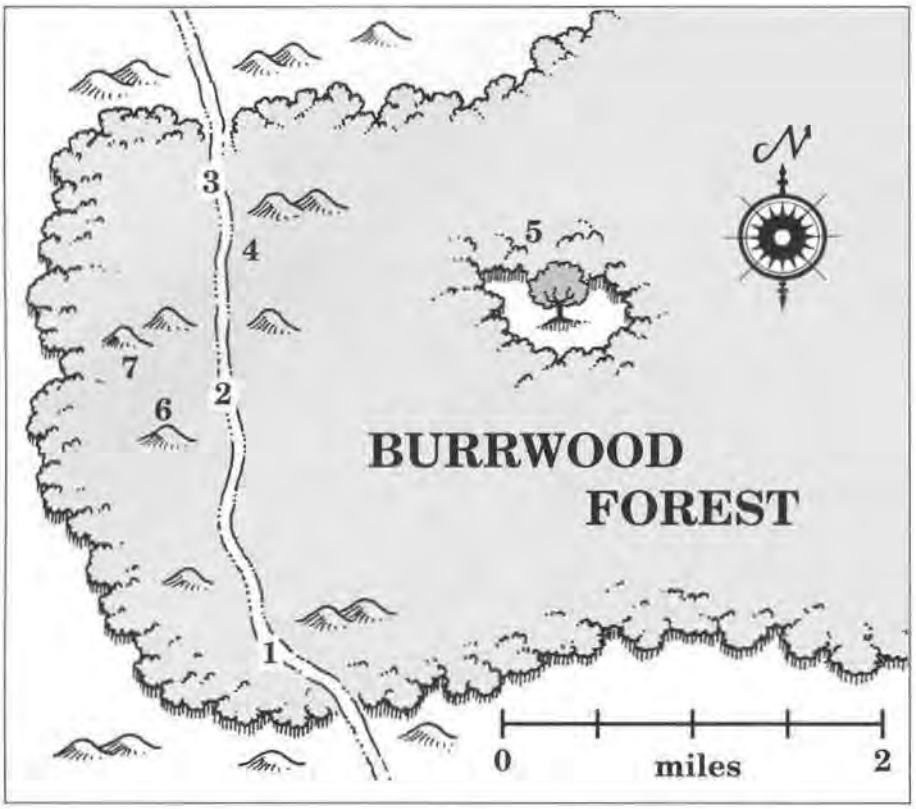
Arachlina does not eat humans or demihumans and prefers to be left alone. (She does, on occasion, eat orcs and goblins, but she won't tell the PCs that. Her morals are similar to a druid's.) However, the plant monsters have been terrorizing her for a month now, and she wants them out of her forest. Being no match for Scortchbark, she sees the PCs as a way of getting rid of him.

Arachlina (werespider): INT average; AL N; AC 4; MV 12, web 18; HD 5+5; hp 42; THAC0 14; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon (as human), 1d4 (as hybrid), 1d12 (as spider); SA poison bite (type A as hybrid, type F as spider; victims who survive have 30% chance of contracting lycanthropy), webbing (as hybrid, requires 1 round per point of Strength under 19 to escape; as spider, requires Bend Bars/Lift Gates roll); SD silver or magic weapon to hit; SZ M or L; ML 12; XP 650; *MC Annual, Volume Three / 76.*

Arachlina is a true lycanthrope and cannot be cured of her lycanthropy. In human form, Arachlina fights with a long bow and arrows coated with her own poison. Currently, the weapons are hidden in her web lair. Her hybrid form resembles that of a human woman with a fearsome six-eyed spider's face.

If the PCs attempt friendly contact with Arachlina, she provides information about the forest and its current condition. She knows the following:

- The forest is full of "nasty plants" that have plagued her for a month.
- The leader of the plants is an "ugly tree fiend" who lives in area **6**. (She can direct them to its lair.)
- The "tree fiend" hides treasure in a hollow oak tree, located at area **5**. It is guarded by "deadly weeds."
- To the west lies a wizard's mansion. She never goes there, but she can bring the PCs within sight of it.



Although Arachlina is willing to accompany the PCs, she should not lead them in their endeavor. Instead she acts as a guide, letting them make their own decisions, perhaps giving advice from time to time.

Arachlina's treasure, hidden in her web, consists of 389 gp and 580 sp. The web also contains the bodies of two deer, which the werespider is letting hang a little before eating.

5. All That Glitters.

> The forest opens into a grassy clearing dominated by a single, large oak tree. The tree has lost its leaves, the result of some disease. There's a large hole in the trunk, in which you spot something shiny.

Scortchbark stores his treasures inside this hollow tree. Though the treant has no use for money, he seems to have a hoarding instinct.

The tree has guardians, all of which are creations of Merklan's wand. First, surrounding the tree are two patches of boring grass. These mindless creatures seek to kill any non-plant that steps on them. Only those who have some knowledge of horticulture or botany (or those who've talked with Arachlina) have any clue that the grass is unusual.

Boring grass (2 patches): INT non-; AL N; AC 8; MV 0; HD 4; hp 30, 28; THAC0 17; #AT 1 per creature in contact; Dmg 5d4/round; SA attacks as if target is AC 10 (modified by Dexterity and magical protection); paralysis; SD only harmed by digging up or burning; SZ H; ML 20; XP 2,000; *MC Annual, Volume Two*/95.

Also lurking in the area is a huge shambling mound—the most powerful plant monster (save Scortchbark) in the forest. More than a servant, the shambler is Scortchbark's second-in-command and on good terms with the evil treant, who will be quite upset if the shambler is slain.

The shambler is 180 feet away from the clearing when the PCs first arrive. If its keen hearing detects the sounds of the PCs fighting the grass, it charges forth at its full movement rate. It fights until destroyed to protect the treasure.

Shambling mound: INT low; AL N; AC 0; MV 6; HD 8; hp 60; THAC0 13; #AT 2; Dmg 2d8/2d8; SA –3 to opponents' surprise rolls; causes suffocation in 2d4 rounds if both attacks hit (Bend Bars/Lift Gates roll to break free); SD immune to blunt weapons; half damage from other weapons; immune to fire; sustains half or no damage from cold; lightning increases size (add 1 HD); SZ L; ML 18; XP 6,000; *MM*/293.

The tree is stuffed with thousands of gold, silver and copper coins (3,870 gp worth), a collection of emeralds, rubies, and sapphires (worth another 3,000 gp), a gold medallion (300 gp), a stylized silver bugle (150 gp), five gold rings set with moonstones (30 gp each), a pearl necklace (300 gp), three unlabeled potions in sealed clay jars (*extra healing, fire breath,* and *diminution*), a scroll of *protection from green dragon breath*, a *ring of swimming*, and a beautifully sewn *cloak of displacement.*

6. Grove of the Evil Tree. This is where Scortchbark hashes his evil plans and spends most of his time.

> This part of the forest is overrun by creepers and thorny vines. The overhanging trees almost block out the sun. The floor of the forest is strewn with the bones of several humanoid creatures. You are startled as one of the nearby trees starts to move!

Scortchbark is not pleased with the PCs for invading "his" forest. He mockingly congratulates them for finding his lair and for stumbling into their own doom, then lashes forth.

Scortchbark (mature evil treant): INT very; AL CE; AC 0; MV 12; HD 9; hp 70; THAC0 11; #AT 2; Dmg 3d6/3d6; SA animate trees (trees fight as mature treants); SD never surprised; fire attacks are +4 to hit and add 1 hp damage per die; saves against fire made at –4; SZ H (16' tall); ML 14; XP 11,000; *MC RAVENLOFT Appendix I*/50. Scortchbark keeps the *wand of the forest bane* with him at all times and also has a potion of *gaseous form* hidden in his branches.

Scortchbark is very different from his past self. While he resembles an oak tree, his wide mouth is lined with rows of thorn-like teeth, and his eyes glow with blue fire. Only a *wish* can restore him to the good treant Goldenbark.

Scortchbark's first line of defense is to use the wand to create three

snapper-saws out of thorn bushes. These plants grab at whatever comes near. Then, the evil treant animates two trees to fight alongside him.

There are several ways the PCs can emerge victorious. They might try to relieve the treant of his evil wand by using calculated disarm maneuvers. The potion of *fire breath* found in area **5** could yield dramatic effects, as the scarred treant has an extreme dislike for fire.

Scortchbark does not retreat until the snapper-saws are destroyed and he is reduced to fewer than 15 hp. If this happens, he abandons the forest, chugging his potion of *gaseous form* and flying slowly westward out of the woods. His clever pattern of flight coupled with the dense forest makes him difficult to follow unless the PCs can *detect invisibility*. He tries to take his wand with him but leaves it if necessary. If the wand is destroyed or taken more than ten miles away, all created plant monsters die, withering into piles of rotted foliage.

The bones in the clearing reveal the grisly fate of the supply traders and dwarven envoys. *Speak with dead* spells confirm that Scortchbark and his plants were responsible. There is no treasure to be found.

Snapper-saws (3): INT non-; AL N; AC 4 (stalks), 7 (leaves), 9 (core); MV 0; HD 5; hp cores: 36, leaves: 10, saws: 20; THAC0 15; #AT 4 saws; Dmg 1d4+1; SA trapping; SZ H; ML 12; XP 420; *MM*/291.

If the PCs look around after the battle, they can see Merklan's house to the west through the trees. Curious PCs may wish to investigate.

7. Merklan's House. PCs who slay or drive off Scortchbark might wish to investigate the dead wizard's abode. Merklan's house is a modest stone structure, except that the south corner has been torn down. The place shows no signs of life. If Arachlina is with them, she refuses to come within a hundred feet of the house; she's heard too many strange noises coming from this area in the past. There are no lights in the house, so anyone coming at night requires illumination of their own.

If the *wand of the forest bane* has not been destroyed or removed from the forest, there are five **needlemen** (hp 22 each) guarding the house with orders to kill any person who comes near. (See area **2** for statistics.) If the treant is aware of the PCs' presence, the guard is tripled. The only area of the house familiar to Scortchbark is room **7I** (the wizard's lab, and the only room he has investigated).

Though the house looks innocent enough, it is actually full of traps and guardians left by a wizard who guarded his secrets like a miser. This is why Scortchbark didn't try to search the rest of the house; he was justifiably cautious about going through the wizard's lair.

7A. Front Door.

> The double front doors seem unremarkable from a distance, but on one of them is a large stone carving of the head of an old man with a beard. Studying the stone visage, you are startled when it opens its eyes and says, "It's very rude to stare!"

The carving is a grandfather plaque, a type of gargoyle created by Merklan. Although the plaque's attitude is somewhat aloof, it seems eager to talk.

The plaque wants the PCs to remove it from the building and place it on an inhabited one; its existence is meaningless without people to guard. It promises them they can have anything in the house if they restore it to its true purpose. The plaque knows nothing about the other traps.

If any of the PCs have a stronghold, the plaque would make a useful addition. If a PC claims it, he or she develops a telepathic bond with the plaque. Alternatively, the PCs could sell the plaque for as much as 7,000 gp. (It does not mind, as long as it's put to guarding something.)

If sympathetic PCs agree to restore the gargoyle's purpose, they should receive double its XP value. If they attack and destroy the plaque, reduce the XP award to 1,000 XP.

Grandfather plaque: INT average; AL LN; AC 6; MV 0; HD 6+2; hp 49; #AT 0; Dmg nil; SA fire two *magic missiles* per round; cast *shout* once per turn; affect anyone touching door with *ray of enfeeblement*; SD *wizard lock* door; magical weapons needed to hit; SZ S; ML 18; XP 2,000; *MC Annual, Volume Three*/49.

7B. Entrance Hall. This small room contains pegs for hanging coats. Positioned in the corner is a wooden stand holding three walking sticks and an old broom. This is actually a *broom of flying*, kept here in the event Merklan needed a quick escape.

Perched over the second door is a stone fresco of an ugly imp. The imp is actually another type of gargoyle called a spouter. Unlike the plaque, the spouter is malicious and attacks anything passing below with its acid spittle. If anyone survives the acid, the spouter flutters down with its small wings to attack with its claws. The gargoyle cannot leave this room and attacks until destroyed.

The spouter believes its master is still alive, possibly on some journey. It refuses to believe anyone who tells it otherwise.

Spouter gargoyle: INT low; AL NE; AC 6; MV 12; HD 5+7; hp 40; THAC0 15; #AT 2; Dmg 1d4+1/1d4+1; SA spit acid within 5' range once every four rounds for 2d20 hp damage (can hit anyone directly below it); SD immune to acid; magical weapons needed to hit; SZ S; ML 14; XP 1,400; *MC Annual, Volume Three*/49.

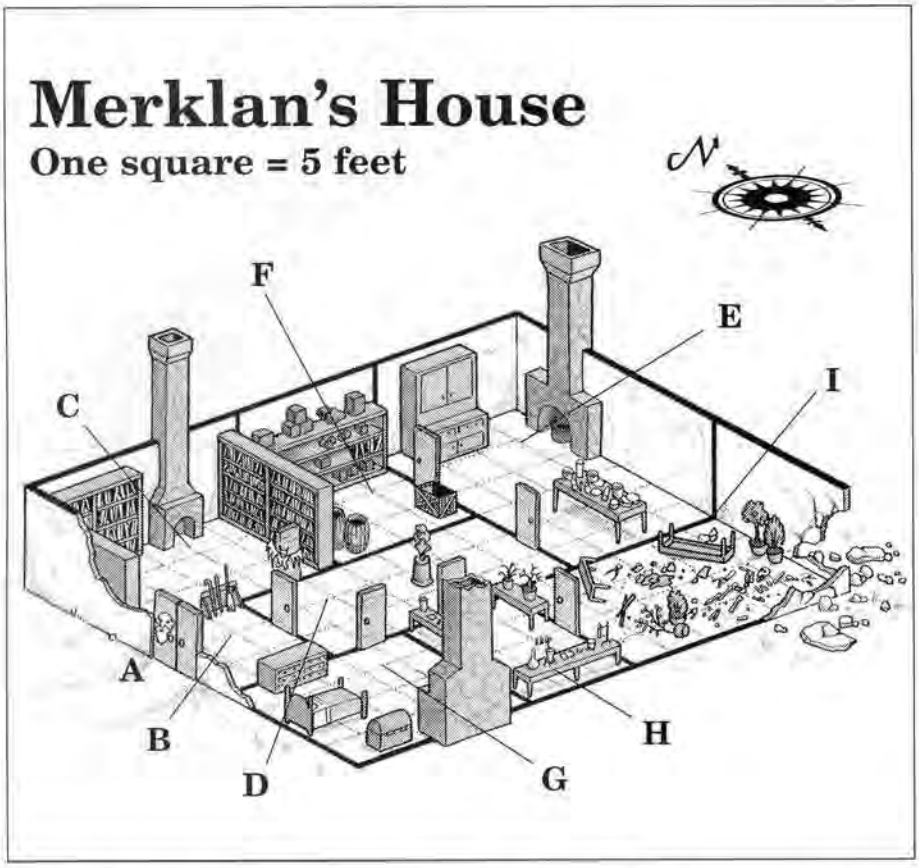
7C. Library.

> Shelves of books line all four walls of this library. Along the northeast wall is a fireplace, over which hangs a painting of a wise old man wearing a skullcap.

The painting is a portrait of Merklan worth 25 gp.

The books on the shelves deal with horticulture, alchemy, metaphysics, and the occult. In all, there are over 400 books. PCs capable of transporting the entire collection can sell the collection for 3,000 gp. None of the books is magical, but a few of them hint at alchemical formulae dealing with poisons and special potions. These dog-eared books were used to turn Goldenbark into Scortchbark, which a wizard PC can determine by reading them and making a successful spellcraft proficiency check.

7D. Gallery. This room is empty save for four oil paintings on the walls and a small statue on a pedestal in the center. Merklan was an avid art collector, although his



attempts at creating art were dismal failures.

The room is trapped with one of Merklan's wards. When any painting or the statue is touched, a *monster summoning II* spell is triggered, transporting five nightshades into the room. Nightshades are plant spirits resembling dwarves covered with vines. (Even in life, all of Merklan's *monster summoning* spells had a plant theme.) As they are summoned creatures, they fight until slain. These monsters do not obey Scortchbark if he is alive, as they were not created by the wand.

Nightshades (5): INT average; AL NE; AC 7; MV 9; HD 1+4; hp 12 (×3), 11, 10; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+1 or by weapon; SA poison sap on weapons (drains 1 point of Dexterity per hit, impotent in 10 rounds); SD immune to wooden weapons; cast *speak with plants* and *pass without trace* at will, *entangle* and *plant door* once/day; SZ M; ML 14; XP 270; *MC Annual, Volume One*; bronze spears.

The obsidian statue is two feet tall and depicts a marilith tanar'ri (a six-armed, snake-bodied woman). It is worth 85 gp to an interested buyer. The paintings depict the following:

#1: Titled *Thunder God*, it depicts a bearded man amid the clouds clutching a thunderbolt, surrounded by noble pegasi (worth 40 gp).

#2: Titled *King of Birds*, it depicts a giant eagle on a mountainside surrounded by several normal eagles (worth 30 gp).

#3: Untitled, this painting clearly depicts the head of a unicorn with a golden horn (worth 20 gp).

#4: Titled *The Trap*, it depicts five fairies caught in the grassy tendrils of an *entangle* spell (worth 10 gp).

7E. Kitchen.

> The smell of rotten food reaches your nostrils as you enter a large kitchen. A half eaten meal, long since spoiled, sits on the kitchen table, amid countless pots, pans, and kettles. Dirty dishes still sit unwashed in a basin.

This kitchen has yet another of Merklan's burglar-traps. If anything is touched, four enchanted meat cleavers levitate out of a half-opened drawer. They fly around and slash at anything in the room. They do not pursue targets beyond the room's confines, however. A *dispel magic* cast against 14th-level magic negates the enchantment.

Flying cleavers (4): INT non-; AL N; AC 5; MV Fl 24 (A); HD 1+1; hp 9 each; THAC0 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4 (×3); SA attack as 3 HD monsters; SD immune to mental control and mind-based spells; SZ T; ML 20; XP 270; *ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA™, Volume 1*/362.

The kitchen contains little of use, with the exception of a large kettle in the fireplace. It is a version of an *everbountiful soup kettle;* instead of soup, it produces beef stroganoff when filled with water. The command word, "Smorgasbord," is written on the kettle's underside.

7F. Pantry. The smell of rotten food is much worse here. This room contains shelves full of breads, cheeses, butter, fruits, and vegetables—all stale and moldy with age.

As the PCs explore this room, they hear chittering, followed by eight tiny eyes flashing in the darkness. These eyes belong to four unseelie faeries, wicked sprites recently attracted to the house by lingering magical dweomers around the structure. This explains why Scortchbark avoids the house. (He fears their magic.)

If the PCs keep their distance, the sprites keep theirs. But as soon as they approach the eyes, the ugly fairies attack using magic first, then shooting PCs with their poisoned arrows. PCs who fall unconscious are stabbed by tiny unseelie swords.

Unseelie faeries (4): INT average; AL CE; AC 6; MV 6 fly 18 (B); HD 1–1; hp 7 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d2 (tiny swords) or 1 (tiny bows); SA magic, anyone seeing faerie affected by *fear* spell; arrows coated with poison (save vs. spell or fall asleep for 2d4 hours); SD turn invisible; MR 25%; SZ T; ML 12; XP 420; *MC Annual, Volume Two*/106. Each of the sprites can cast a certain spell once/day: *lightning bolt* (Wix), *Evard's black tentacles* (Nix), *confusion* (Vix) and *web* (Pix).

The faeries have no treasure. The only good foodstuffs left are five bottles of wine (three red, two white) and a keg of ale. One bottle of white wine is actually magical. Anyone who drinks a cup of this *wine of restful slumber* falls asleep for one turn. Upon awakening, the imbiber feels as refreshed as if he had slept a full eight hours. Wizards may memorize new spells after this short sleep. There is enough wine in the bottle for six glasses.

7G. Bedroom. This bedchamber looks unremarkable. It contains a large wooden bed, shag rugs, and a wooden chest and dresser, both filled with clothes.

7H. Botanical Laboratory. The door to this room is locked (the keys are in area **7I**). It may be picked open, opened with a *knock* spell, or forced open by inflicting 10 hp damage with a blunt weapon (AC 7).

This is where Merklan conducted his research in alchemy and horticulture. Embedded in the ceiling is a large skylight. There are flasks, bottles, and beakers on several tables as well as many dead plants that perished due to lack of water. On one table, along with several pieces of alchemical equipment, are four unlabeled potions (*flying, growth, plant control,* and *delusion*).

Merklan's journal lies on another table and mostly contains details on his experiments, and research into the occult, botany and horticulture. The last entry reads as follows:

> *Tonight I am finally ready. My diligent research has paid off. The essence taken from the treant will provide me with the power for the wand I will use to create plants that are not only firm and resilient, but actually mobile and intelligent. Lesser men might fear what I have created ... and that is why they are lesser men.*

The wizard's journal is neither magical nor valuable.

7I. Magical Laboratory. This door is locked. PCs can pick the lock, or they can force it open with a *knock* spell or by inflicting 15 hp damage with a blunt weapon (AC 7).

> This room is in utter disarray. Paper, glass and the remains of furniture are scattered everywhere. The south corner has been torn away, revealing the woods outside. A skeleton lies sprawled on the floor. It wears the tattered remains of a wizard's robe, and much of the bones are broken. Near it are a collection of potted plants. The place stinks of death.

The PCs have found Merklan. His bones lie on the floor, shattered and broken by Scortchbark.

The only thing to survive the battle were the keys to this room and room **7H** (found under some wreckage), as well as Merklan's mouldering spell book. The book lies under a table and contains 1d4+4 spells of each level up to eighth, half of them Alteration spells. (The DM should choose spells from the list in the *PHB* or *Tome of Magic.*)

If the PCs are having too easy a time with this adventure, there is one more obstacle for them to face. The potted plants on the floor (which, strangely, have not died) were specially treated by Merklan to receive tests from the wand. Over the past year, the unnatural plants have been growing, feeding on evil energy. The magic is triggered by anyone touching Merklan's spell book:

> You notice that one of the plants is changing. It grows at an alarming rate, vines and creepers spilling out and twisting, forming limbs and horrifying features. A gasp escapes your lips as the vegetable monstrosity turns to you and glares.

The resulting creature is terrible indeed. It resembles a slimy mass of vines and thorns with arms and legs. Six-inch thorn-like claws grow from its "hands," and equally long rows of teeth line its huge mouth. Nearly mindless, the creature has no purpose other than to destroy the living, starting with the characters.

Merklan's plant monster: INT semi; AL CE; AC –1; MV 6; HD 11; hp 85; THAC0 9; #AT 3 (claw/claw/bite); Dmg 1d10/1d10/2d6; SA see below; SD see below; MR 50%; SZ L (11' tall); ML 18; XP 9,000; New Monster.

New Magical Item

Wand of the Forest Bane

This powerful item was fashioned by the evil wizard Merklan from the root of a treant. It resembles nothing more than a gnarled, dried root.

When the wand is pointed at a plant and the command word *blok-nat* is spoken, the plant mutates into one of the following plant-like monsters, determined by the wand user or by random roll (1d8):

1. Needleman
2. Mold man (vegepygmy)
3. Thorny
4. Snapper-saw
5. Thornslinger
6. Giant sundew
7. Shambling mound
8. Mantrap

The transformation takes one full round, during which the monster cannot attack. Only monsters with intelligence of Low or less can be created this way. The created monsters automatically obey the wielder.

The wand works differently than most wands. Instead of having charges, the magic item can create 15 HD worth of monsters per day. Thus the wand wielder can create three 5-HD monsters, five 3-HD monsters, or one 10-HD monster and one 5-HD monster, or any similar combination. "Charges" that aren't used at the end of the day are wasted. When a random monster is created, the type tends to resemble the original plant. A thorn bush might become a needleman, while a normal cactus might become a vampire cactus.

Using the wand is dangerous. Each time it is employed, the user's alignment moves one step toward chaotic evil. After animating 90 HD of plant monsters, the user's alignment becomes chaotic evil. This change can be remedied only with atonement or similar means. Destroying the wand is simply a matter of breaking it or burning it to ashes.

XP Value: 3,000 **GP Value:** 9,000

The beast is immune to electricity, mind-affecting spells (except those affecting plants), piercing weapons, and illusions. Anyone struck by its claws must save vs poison or be paralyzed for 1d4 turns.

Once per turn, the beast releases a flurry of thorns, inflicting 3d6 hp damage to all within ten feet (save vs. breath weapon for half damage). This flurry occurs at the end of the round, after the monster has made its regular attacks for that round. Anyone foolish enough to grapple with it is impaled for 1d12 hp damage (no save).

Concluding the Adventure

To receive their full payment, the PCs must bring proof that they have destroyed the threat in the forest. Arachlina can vouch for the party's success to Bergon if the PCs can persuade her to accompany them back to the dwarves. Arachlina returns to the forest later, refusing any reward offered to her. Whether she appears again is up to the DM.

PCs should receive a story award of 8,000 XP for defeating the evil plants and restoring the trade route. If the *wand of the forest bane* is destroyed, they should split another 3,000 XP.

With the destruction of the wand (or Scortchbark's departure), all plant monsters wither away and die. The dwarves are grateful for the reopening of the trade route but are shocked at the horrible fate of their envoys. Bergon insists on accompanying the PCs to Serendipity, where he explains matters to the town council.

If Scortchbark escapes (with or without the wand), he might show up again in the future. Perhaps a local druid asks the PCs to seek out and destroy this abomination of nature.

Finally, there's the matter of the Burrwood itself. The evil treant's territory covers only about half of it, leaving plenty of room for devious DMs to fill in. Who knows what grim dangers or monsters the forest could hide? Only time will tell. Ω

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Nodwick
by Aaron Williams
I AM THE GUARDIAN OF THIS HOUSE, CREATED BY THE LATE OWNER!
WHOA! A TALKING TRIVET!
PLEASE, I HAVE A FAVOR TO ASK: TAKE ME FROM HERE TO A PLACE WHERE I CAN BE A USEFUL PROTECTOR
NO PROBLEM! NODWICK, PUT GRAMPS WITH OUR STUFF.
AH! TO HAVE A PURPOSE AGAIN!
THIS ISN'T EXACTLY WHAT I HAD IN MIND...
BE THANKFUL THAT I DON'T NEED TO RE-TILE THE BATHROOM.
XXX
YEAGAR'S ALE!
DO NOT TOUCH!!